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The Contemporary Theatre, 1926

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By James Agate

With an Introduction by
Arnold Bennett

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TO

BETTY RICKETTS

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Introduction

SOME plain speaking ! The agreeable invitation to introduce this volume of distinguished dramatic criticism provides an opportunity, which I could not persuade myself to neglect, to discuss the plight of the London stage.

I can find serious reasons for the plight of the London stage, but I do not find among them the economic reason. That theatrical managers have serious economic difficulties is undeniable. Their economic difficulties, however, are not more serious than those of the directors of other sorts of business enterprise. To listen to the theatrical managers one would imagine that they alone have suffered by the war. It is not so. We have all suffered—and suffered about equally. If the special entertainment tax is a burden, the same may be said of the special tax on motor transport, and of other special taxes. I agree that the burden of the entertainments tax is unfair and even iniquitous. But where taxes are concerned, governments are always capable of unfairness and iniquity. Governments have to be borne, like the climate.

Theatre rents are very heavy ; but since the demand for theatres still exceeds the supply, and since people in

plenty are still willing to pay the heavy rents asked, it is evident that the rents are not uneconomic. Nobody is forced to pay them. Theatrical managers do not walk out into Shaftesbury Avenue with loaded revolvers and compel the timid to come inside and sign leases. England remains a free country.

The notion that the heavy rents are due to the system of sub-lessees and sub-sub-lessees is simply silly. The said system is the result, not the cause, of a rising market. When prospective sub-sub-lessees are seriously assured that rents are indeed uneconomic, they will hold off, and rents will fall. This may happen quite soon.

Nor can the plight of the London theatre be attributed to the size of the salaries of a few stars. The salary of the average player is certainly less, in terms of goods value, than it was before the war. And if the few stars are very handsomely paid, the sole explanation is that their beauty or their talent may reasonably be expected to bring into the box office sums sufficient to compensate the manager for his outlay. The demand for stars still exceeds the supply.

Of all the foolish remedies advocated by simpletons for the salvation of the London stage, the most foolish is the lowering of prices for seats. The prices of seats are not too high ; they are too low. At the most, in terms of goods value, the pre-war pound is worth to-day thirteen shillings—a generous estimate. The price of every other commodity has risen more than the price of theatre seats. The price of stalls indeed

has not risen ; it stands where it did. In terms of goods value the occupant of a stall is paying to the manager of the threatre rather less than seven shillings for the article which before the war cost him half a guinea—while for his restaurant dinner he is paying half as much again as before the war. And then on the top of this singular state of affairs, the physicians come along and assert that the West End stage is in a mess because playgoers will not pay even the equivalent of the pre-war seven shillings ! And they will make the assertion in face of the obvious fact that playgoers, when they see a chance of genuine amusement, will tumble over each other to pay the price ordinarily asked. Give them a show they honestly enjoy, and they will pay the price willingly, they will pay it in tens and hundreds of thousands, they will pay it for years together. It is not inability or unwillingness to pay that keeps auditoriums empty. There are shows which would be without audiences even if the managers thereof offered to pay audiences to witness them.

Among the phenomena (other than the competition of the cinema and the wireless), which in fact do keep auditoriums empty, and therefore help to account for the plight of the London stage, I will name the following :—

(1) *Inaudibility, or Imperfect Audibility, of the Performers.*—I have been complaining about this, in public and in private, for a decade or more. And I have heard with my own ears (which are in excellent order) hundreds of complaints about it from friends, acquaint-

ances and complete strangers. I personally know people who will not go to a play at all unless they can be sure of seats in the first three rows of the stalls. At nearly every play, though I am usually very well placed, I miss words, often whole phrases, and they are apt to be important words and phrases. This kind of thing is an extremely severe handicap on any play. One ought to be able to hear with ease and without the slightest strain. The explanation of the phenomenon is simple : actors and actresses simply do not know their job. I remember once a young actor thus addressing me : " You tell me to speak up. But if I force myself I lose my effects." I made no answer. I just walked away from this nincompoop. Players who are inaudible have simply never learnt how to produce their voices. There should be no question of " forcing " the voice in order to be heard clearly.

Again and again I have said to players : " You can act till you are black in the face, but it will be of no use unless you are heard." Again and again I have implored players not to drop their voices towards the end of a sentence. But they will do it. Again and again I have tried to supervise rehearsals from the back of the dress circle. Hopeless ! Again and again I have been told (as though I had not been attending rehearsals for twenty years) that it would be " all right on the night." It never has been all right on the night.

That perfect audibility can be achieved in any theatre is proved by the fact that in every performance one or two players are perfectly heard, for the reason

that the one or two have learnt their job. It may be said that as a rule good players are heard and bad players are not heard. Nobody ever misses a word spoken by such performers as Gladys Cooper, Mary Rorke, Frederick Kerr, Dennis Eadie, Allan Aynesworth ; and if these had to perform in St. Paul's Cathedral they would be heard. It may also be said that as a rule the older players are better than the younger. If the British public was not a patient ass, the inaudibility scandal would be done away with in six months.

(2) *Bad Acting*.—There is an enormous amount of bad acting rife on the West End stage. The number of players who can act really well even in minor parts is small. The number of players who can sustain a leading part is pitiably small. Only those who have to cast plays realise fully the horrid truth of these statements. It is a common occurrence in theatrical management that a play has to be indefinitely postponed because only one player in London can be safely entrusted with a particular part, and he or she is engaged. No wonder that the salaries of stars are big ! So they ought to be. The legend that crowds of talented and trained players are eagerly waiting for a chance is fantastic.

(3) *Bad Producing*.—London producing, compared with the producing of other countries, is generally bad. And when it is good it is old-fashioned. Continental managers and American managers laugh at our native producing, so ingenuous and so slack. Most

rehearsals are slack. A thousand details which cry out for attention are passed over. The producer goes in fear of the stars, and often of the second rankers. Rehearsals begin late. They end when some one has to run off to an engagement for afternoon tea. When American plays succeed in London they succeed as much by their American producing as by anything else. And when they fail, English producing is chiefly to blame. Often I have heard foreign managers exclaim upon seeing a play which they had previously seen in their own countries : " I shouldn't have recognised it." American methods of rehearsal are, I believe, brutal. But I would sooner have brutality with results than drawing-room manners without. Every one comments favourably on the smartness and energy of American producing in London. Much more brutality and much more autocracy, and much more vitality and much more finish are required in English producing.

(4) *Deterioration of Performances during a Run.*—Generally speaking, performances are not consistently watched. For the first fifteen or twenty performances the quality improves. Then it begins to deteriorate. It gets worse and worse, until in some cases it reaches the point of being an insult to the audience. The producer's work ought not to end till the run ends. Rehearsals ought to be called for the slightest lapse. Nothing like a rehearsal call to bring the slackers up with a jerk !

(5) *Mealy-mouthed Dramatic Criticism.*—There is a journalistic tradition that critics must handle the stage

with great delicacy. Are we not all children ? Do we not all simply love the stage, even to arriving early in the theatre so that we may love the very sounds of the orchestra tuning up ? (Not that the orchestra ever does tune up !) Are not the players dear creatures all doing their best, and many of them so winsome and such darlings of their publics ? And so on. This tradition does not extend to the treatment of playwrights. Unless they happen to have consistent and great popular success, playwrights are treated by critics as no better than they should be. The presumption is that they are criminals, and the treatment is to vivisect them for their crimes. But players are different from playwrights because they are such dears —especially the women. Good plays, it appears, never save bad acting, but good acting may save bad plays ! The playwright never has to struggle with bad acting, but good players have to struggle against bad plays ! If a play is " saved " it never saves itself ; some player of genius saves it !

The truth about really popular playwrights is seldom told, and almost never about players—popular and unpopular. The worst thing said of a player is that he was miscast. It is remarkable how the Press will apparently conspire to build up the reputation of a player who through some accident totally unconnected with talent has come to the front, or who has been forced to the front by the power of money. There are players in the West End, mainly women, who never could act and never will act, who make a mess of every

part they undertake, whom the entire theatrical and journalistic world knows to be perfect duds—and yet year after year critics will either laud their efforts to heaven or will keep a falsifying silence about them.

The public, indeed, is seldom put into possession of the critic's mind.

Some critics refer to the dangers of the law of libel ; but I have not noticed that these dangers have a mollifying influence upon criticism when it deals with authors, or film producers, or company directors, or Members of Parliament.

To be just, I must admit that my criticism of critics does not comprise some critics of the Sunday papers and the weekly reviews. The three most influential Sunday critics do say what they think, and with vivacity. Mr. James Agate is one of these. And further, Mr. James Agate is quite the best critic of acting that we have, and writes a good deal of what he feels even about stars of the first magnitude. But broadly, my criticism of critics is based upon facts.

If any one would like to learn what candid theatrical criticism can be, let him read the wonderful volume of Maurice Boissard's collected articles recently published by the Librairie Gallimard. This book ought to open British eyes, and be an exemplar to British critics. Maurice Boissard is capable of being very rude. He is as rude as Alan Dale, of New York, and far more deadly. I do not desire British critics to

imitate the rudeness, but only the frankness, of the afore-mentioned foreign critics. At present their good-natured or their sentimental tolerance must count among the influences which hamper the progress of the London stage.

(6) *Managements.*—By managements I mean the individuals or small groups who direct the policies of theatres—that is to say, who choose the plays for production. Most managements are impermanent. Most theatres pass from hand to hand, and therefore are not identifiable with any consistent policies and have no publics of their own; whereas in former days the majority of theatres had consistent policies and regular patrons.

All managements, however, even to-day, are not impermanent. There are still a few permanent managements, though none of them is above temporarily letting its house for the production of plays not consonant with its established policy. These permanent managements produce either (*a*) musical comedies, or (*b*) any plays by authors with a fixed reputation for success, or (*c*) comedies.

As regards (*a*), I have no prejudice against musical plays, though I can remember not a single one that gave me tolerable satisfaction as a playgoer. The bulk of them seem to me to be very much alike, and to have scarcely any connection with the art of music or the art of the drama. When you have seen one you have seen fifty.

As regards (*b*), little need be said. Plays by steadily

successful authors are sometimes very good, sometimes very bad, and sometimes neither one nor the other. Taken as a whole, they do not seriously clash with a consistent policy, nor do they assist or impede the artistic progress of the stage.

As regards (*c*), what I assert is that the permanent managements with a consistent comedy policy rarely present anything of artistic value. They show no practical interest in original dramatic art. They have a horror of novelty. Their sole preoccupation appears to be commercial. They will not accept what strikes them as an unusual risk, and if they do in the stress of circumstances accept an unusual risk, it is almost always with a bad stock-pattern play, and very seldom with an original play. Exceptions exist. One could name a couple of fairly permanent managements who have accepted, and will no doubt accept again, risks for the sake of a play that is recognisably different from ten thousand other plays.

The mischief with permanent managements is that for the most part they are supine ; they sit still and expect plays to walk into their offices. And if they do happen to produce, after a lot of rubbish or mediocrity, one good play, and it fails, they cry out, resentful :

" There ! You see the reward of a management that tries ! "

And swear never any more to touch good plays.

Apparently they cannot see that if you want a policy of good plays to succeed you must persevere with it. One unsuccessful production is not sufficient proof that

a policy is worthless. Even the vilest plays occasionally fail.

As regards impermanent managements, they are too numerous and too various to submit to any classification. But it may safely be said that the majority of them are destined to failure from the start. They come into being because somebody with less sense than money, and still less knowledge and experience than sense, has been bitten with the desire, for purely personal reasons, to present a particular play or a particular player to the public; or, in the alternative, because somebody similarly endowed and ungifted thinks it would be rather jolly, for all sorts of reasons, to run a theatre. There is an endless queue of these idiots. With trifling exceptions, plays and players so presented are bad from every point of view, in that they please nobody.

If you are to succeed in the theatre, the *sine qua non* is that you must be passionately interested in the theatre for itself, more interested in the theatre than in anything else whatever.

Withal, I do not consider the condition of the London stage as at all hopeless. The prestige of British playwrights is very high in America and fairly high on the Continent. A continental manager not long since gave me his opinion that the best plays in the world were being written by British authors. And small, precarious managements are continually springing up, dying, and springing up again, whose aim is artistic and not by any means primarily commercial.

Slowly these managements are having their effect on public taste, which is improving and which was never so bad as the taste of the average commercial management.

ARNOLD BENNETT.

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Greek Play

The "Œdipus Tyrannus" of Sophocles

A Play. Translated by J. T. SHEPPARD

New Scala Theatre

ONE regretted on Sunday night that amongst Mr. Arnold Bennett's simplificatory hand-books there should be none entitled "How to Look at Greek Tragedy." For if any spectator at a Greek play imagines that about three-quarters way through illumination will suddenly descend upon him, as it does in the case of baseball, pelota, knurr and spell, and other intricate yet understandable inventions of the human mind, he imagines a vain thing. It is possible, even, that the making of those adjustments and allowances which will naturally occur to him will put him still more firmly and securely on the wrong track. He begins, of course, by discounting the masks and the buskins. The Greek, he reflects pityingly, knowing nothing of the modern playhouse with its delights of profit rentals and pit queues, had to make shift with an outdoor theatre, as it might be the Stadium at Wembley; the actor to make himself heard must use a megaphone, to conceal which the mask was a convenience; whilst

to prevent himself from being dwarfed by the huge arena he must use a boot with a six-inch sole. Therefore, take off the mask and the boot, make the necessary translation allowance, and if there is anything except cant in all he has been told about Greek tragedy the thing should move him as much as the best of Shakespeare. Only it just doesn't. Why ?

Well, the spectator who finds himself brought up against this blank wall has had many illustrious predecessors. There was Corneille, who, deeming the *Œdipus Tyrannus* to be lacking in dramatic variety, introduced two other characters at whom the Oracle in turn was supposed to point ; and there was Voltaire, who, holding the thing short of sentimental intrigue, invented Prince Philoctetus, a former lover of Jocasta, and, as Lemaître says, " entertains us at some length with their liaison." But even the great French critic did not entirely succeed in ridding himself of the trammels of modern opinion, and so arriving at the Greek point of view. He could see the dramatic force of Œdipus's interjection " Creon ! " that single word showing how the unhappy king will clutch at any straw pointing to some treacherous plot, and thereby putting off revelation of his own guilt. He saw the extraordinary power and pathos of the early scenes in which Œdipus calls in brain-sickly fashion for more and more evidence, hoping against hope that each new witness will speak something to his innocence. He sees how foolish it was of Voltaire not to realise that by this persistence Sophocles does not mean to imply thick-

headedness on the part of Œdipus, but rather to enlighten us as to how much a man may suffer. When Voltaire exclaimed, *Cet Œdipe est donc idiot!* he was really telling us how little he understood the play.

But Lemaître in turn has his lapses from understanding. He will make concessions; he will not object that no steps should have been taken to track down the murderer of Laius, or that Jocasta and Œdipus, married for twelve years, should never have told each other their past. But he objects to what goes on in the mind of Œdipus before and after the tragic discovery. Surely, argues Lemaître, the first precaution that any man would take who has had foretold to him that he must kill his father and marry his own mother would be never to kill an older man or marry a girl except of his own age. And he further complains that Œdipus, after the discovery of what he has done, fails to adopt either the strong-minded course of going away and leaving the solution to time, or the weak-minded one of killing himself. He is upset because the Greek hero pursues the middle course of plucking out his eyes.

In this connection I recall a lecture given by a French professor before a performance of Racine's *Andromaque*. "Le roi Pyrrus, étant fort épris d'Andromaque, se trouve dans la nécessité d'abandonner Hermione." Lemaître conceives Œdipus as a modern character who has been *fort épris*, though innocently, of the wrong character; and he is annoyed because the

unfortunate fellow does not take the boulevard's view of his position. But that, surely, is to consider this Greek tragedy as though Henry Becque had written it under the title of *La Thébéene*.

Now we must come back to the masks. Since Greek tragedy in the beginning was an off-shoot of the choral worship of Dionysus, the whole essence of the dramatist's business was to keep in touch with the persons of the legends consecrated by the Dionysian faith. He refrained, therefore, from those realistic touches which would make human beings of his personages, because his object was to present types in which Hellenic humanity would recognise itself, only dowered with something god-like and enhanced with virtue twice as large as life and not intended to be half so natural. The human features not being sufficiently noble, nor the stature sufficiently impressive, the mask and the cothurnus were requisitioned. Add to this semi-godlike idea the Greek view that no man can elude his destiny, though, contrariwise, he may try to trick Fate as Jocasta did when she gave away the child. Last, and most important of all, there is the view strongly denied by modern opinion that sin may be committed unconsciously. Œdipus, leaving Corinth, makes no bones about having killed an old man until he learns that the victim is his father, whereupon he deems the universe to have become a Gummidgian "wale" with himself as dead focus and centre.

It is no use bringing to Sophocles the frame of mind which is prepared to enjoy Shakespeare. Macbeth's

sharp personal definition, his sense of responsibility and the luxury of woe, even such a line as the rapturous "The shard-borne beetle with his drowsy hums," uttered by a man contemplating murder, would in Greek eyes have been unforgivable playwriting. Shakespeare is not the air here any more than Corneille. We, the spectators, are to doff our interest in humanity and think in terms of resolution and expiation. Œdipus is equally resolute in fending off discovery and in getting to the truth of the matter. In so far as he is human he will put up a defence ; it is the god in him which will have the truth. And, the truth once out, he is for the utmost penance ; whereas Macbeth, with one foot in the grave, will enjoy talking the other into it almost as much as fighting to keep out both.

Personally, I confess to finding the masks and boots an immense help in fixing the mind upon abstractions of virtue and reconciling it to the absence of "human interest." Possibly the masks were not very good in themselves. That of Œdipus was fairly satisfactory. But Jocasta's looked exactly like the visage which Miss Sydney Fairbrother used to compose for Mrs. May's landlady, while Creon's surliness was that of a sporting butcher after losing a trotting match at Greenford Park. Mr. Saintsbury's voice was, one thought, a trifle too light for Œdipus, and neither noble nor moving enough for that immensely fine and long last speech. Mr. Wilfrid Walter made a burly figure of Creon. The Chorus—but then I confess to being so very little Greek that very little Chorus suffices me. One left the theatre pitying

the poor French who are so *fort épris* of Racine and Corneille that they find Sophocles an irrational bore and Shakespeare a clumsy barbarian. Strange that so intellectual a race can make the polished worst of both worlds ! Or one reflected upon the fact that stupendous genius in one age may have nothing in common with stupendous genius in another. Or possibly upon the comparative littleness of mere talent.

January 17.

Elizabethan Drama

Two Hamlets

Mr. RUGGERO RUGGERI and His Italian Company

Globe Theatre

Performance in Aid of Sadler's Wells Theatre Fund

Lyceum Theatre

NOTHING in the theatre distresses me more than to listen to a performance in a strange tongue. Drama and the acting of drama may appeal primarily to the emotions, but the way leads through the intellect. To have one's brain put out of action and to depend solely upon eye and ear—this is a baffling, miserable business. "Oh, but it's *Hamlet*, and you ought to know all about it," one can hear the reader exclaim. One would know roughly, of course, what any Hamlet was up to if he spoke in Choctaw. But roughly, in the case of a distinguished actor, won't do; it is like offering a would-be appraiser of diamonds the grocer's scales. Let it be confessed that my courage failed me on Mr. Ruggeri's first night, and that I went to the fly-weight championship at the National Sporting Club, where at least the boxing was in English. My

impressions of the Italian actor are culled from the Wednesday afternoon performance, and it must be definitely understood that they are only impressions.

"Visibles," said Bacon, "are swiftlier carried to the sense than audibles." And since in acting they mean almost as much, let me begin by saying that Mr. Ruggeri's Hamlet is a prince both in body and mind. Mark the elegance of his gestures, and, in the early colloquy with Polonius and the courtiers, his use of the mantle trailing from his shoulder. Note how he is undefeated by, and even gets beauty into, all those hutchings and thrutchings, and deploys those silken tassels to express contempt of dotard, time-servers, and the sorry scheme of thing into which he is born. Note the plastic beauty and mobile grace of features expressive of the inner workings of a subtle mind, of half-thoughts and resolutions that never come to birth. Think but of one moment in the play, the moment when in his mother's closet Hamlet again sees the Ghost, and is at once visibly withdrawn into another world, from which he comes back as one returning from a trance—the whole effect achieved without cost of a single word. Then open your ears and listen to that flow of speech, eloquent yet low in tone, too full, you must believe, of spiritual meaning to admit of sound or foam. Consider these things, and you realise that you are in the presence of a princely actor and an artist of supreme distinction.

But not, or so I felt, in the presence of Hamlet. For this creature so graciously presented is too princely, too

fastidious, too highly intellectualised. The very essence of Hamlet, I take it, is that he is one with his kind, a man human enough to know the common passions, yet cursed with a bent for philosophy, which he himself describes as pale and sickly. The play is crammed full of hints as to Hamlet's capacity for tenderness. He loved his father, has affection for his mother and Horatio, and would have loved Ophelia but for the blight which Gertrude's sin has cast upon her sex. Try as I would, I could not find the smallest trace of humanity in Mr. Ruggeri's Hamlet, who was a creation of pure brain, loving no other soul and not even himself, holding studiously aloof not only from the Court but from the whole human race. This Hamlet had no humour other than the sardonic. He lacked romantic splendour, and the great soliloquies failed of their immemorial effect. You may say it is vulgar to treat these things as a virtuoso treats a cadenza in a concerto, but I shall not be persuaded that they were not written to show off the rhetorician, and must be so delivered. The soliloquy beginning " O what a rogue and peasant slave am I " is more than a piece of philosophical reasoning ; in it Hamlet gives vent in words to all the passion which he is never to express in deeds. It should work up through a long crescendo to the last fortissimo when all restraint is thrown away :—

> 'Swounds, I should take it : for it cannot be
> But I am pigeon-liver'd and lack gall
> To make oppression bitter, or ere this

> I should have fatted all the region kites
> With this slave's offal : bloody, bawdy villain !
> Remorseless, treacherous, lecherous, kindless villain !
> O, Vengeance !

It is here that the dam should burst ; the actor may, nay must, batter the throne with his naked fists. Even Forbes-Robertson, whom nobody would accuse of over-stepping the modesty of Nature, did so. This is the tragedy's topmost peak in point of sound, just as Hamlet's leap on to the throne at the words " Why, let the stricken deer go weep " is the visual climax. The rest is descent. Again, I take it that at the words, " Nay, an thou'lt mouth, I'll rant as well as thou," Hamlet should do both. Mr. Ruggeri played this whole scene *sotto voce*, and instead of leaping into the grave just sidled into it. But the mischief had started early on. Surely the revelation by the Ghost should be a soul-shaking affair, whereas this Hamlet seemed only moderately troubled, and inclined to regard the matter as a curious one for investigation later on. Hamlet's problem, one felt, was not to screw his resolution to the sticking place but to determine which, if any, of the phantoms surrounding him was real. It has been finely said of Forbes-Robertson that his Hamlet had the quality of Watts' pictures, which might not be the greatest of their kind but could hang in a cathedral without seeming silly. One feels that Mr. Ruggeri's Hamlet might hang in the study of Einstein or Pirandello without affronting either master or pupil.

May we not now desist from debating, with the woolly intensity of German professors, the question of madness? There is question in this play not of two doctors and a certificate but of a company of actors and a playwright. May one say that this piece possesses everything except unity, and every quality except that of being wholly intelligible? One can burst one's eyeballs in the effort to discover anything beyond overstrung nerves in spite of all the talk of insanity. Shakespeare certainly didn't finish Gertrude, who remains almost entirely unexplored; may one suggest that he never quite finished her son in the sense that he did not make him entirely cohere? The fact that all the world can see himself in Hamlet proves that Hamlet cannot be any one man. The actor must choose his compromise, avoiding both that straightening out which is impossible and those chameleon-like tergiversations which make of Hamlet not a man but a multitude. I submit that Mr. Ruggeri straightened out too much, and presented the character as an ice-cold, immensely sane intellect stalking freezingly about a subjugated world.

Mr. Russell Thorndike is a brave man, and bravery comes by its reward on the stage as elsewhere. Nature, having denied this actor beauty of voice and grace of person, has made the one atonement possible—she has given him romantic passion and dæmonic energy. Mr. Thorndike's Hamlet is everything that Mr. Ruggeri's wants; it makes up for lack of subtlety by a quality like the pluck in a good photographic negative. There

is a fire in his heart. He is not lovable, because the actor is without the physical means of expressing tenderness ; but you feel that this Hamlet would have liked to be loved, whereas the other towered beyond possibility of affection. Mr. Thorndike kept an immense audience both excited and amused, never letting us forget that Hamlet was a man of wit, and delivering the soliloquies, if not with beauty, then at least with gusto. Here was a man full of thwarted urgency, devising action and suffering hindrance under our very eyes, and not remotely, at the end of a corridor. This was essentially the Hamlet for a big house, and consorted well, one would say without disrespect, with the scent of orange-peel.

There can be no doubt as to which of the two productions was the better as a whole. Mr. Ruggeri had surrounded himself by a company which it would be sycophantic to call competent. A buxom Ophelia cried aloud for the music with which Donizetti has supplied Lucia di Lammermoor, and bowed her acknowledgments after she was drowned looking as dry as, and even more cheerful than, the heroine of Millais's picture. Gertrude was a *secunda donna* so spiritually thin that she could hardly be said to exist at all. Claudius, with touzled hair and bearded like the pard, wore a dressing-gown which by itself constituted an act of *lèse-majesté*. Rosencrantz and Guildenstern bore themselves like Second Murderers, Polonius only wanted a wreath of mistletoe to look like an Arch-Druid, while Horatio had the air of a footman in momentary expectation of a

week's wages in lieu of notice. Mr. Pettinelli's Laertes and Mr. Pestelli's Player King were good. Indeed all the strolling players were well done, appearing to feel acutely their position as rogues and vagabonds. This is of the period, and entirely right. I liked the naïve scenery, and the delightful way in which, when the actors had done with a bit of it, stage-hands came and took it away. There was some quite unnecessary display of dazzle-lights to prevent one noticing this. But illusion, when once it has been set going, is stronger than shirt-sleeves, and one would back Mr. Ruggeri against a whole company of scene-shifters.

The Lyceum production was staged in the representational, adequate Lyceum way, and on the very good principle of horses for courses. Miss Fay Compton still gives the best Ophelia I have ever seen. But then I never saw Ellen Terry's. Miss Compton's performance has the quality of elves weeping under the moon, and how the older actress and sunniest of players could ever diminish herself to that dim radiance I can never quite imagine. Perhaps the great heart of her was not content with encompassing less than both glories. In these lesser times, I suggest that the softer effulgence should suffice. There are parts for which Miss Thorndike's strong-mindedness and suggestion of Puritan atmosphere generously unfit her, and Gertrude is one of them. The idea that this Queen could forsake mountains and batten upon moors was unthinkable; one felt that she would have set that court to rights in no time, and done it cheerfully. That Messrs. O. B.

Clarence and Ben Greet know all about Polonius and the First Gravedigger goes without saying, and Mr. Courtenay Thorpe's Ghost was, as usual, perfectly grisly.

April 25.

"Macbeth"

By WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE

Princes Theatre

SURTOUT, pas trop de zèle! Or, as we say, moderation in all things. Does unabridged Shakespeare really suit the picture stage? And if you give the dramatist his head, should you not leave him his full complement of acts with the climaxes where he put them? The pause at the end of this play's real Act One is useful as marking the passage of time. Duncan has supped late and gone to bed. At the beginning of Act Two, Fleance thinks the hour is after twelve, Macduff makes his call; and later we are told definitely by Lady Macbeth that the murder took place round about two o'clock. Run these acts together and Duncan is apparently murdered within twenty minutes of his arrival at the Castle. We lose the sense of the most awful pause known to tragedy.

Mr. Casson places the dagger scene and the "staircase" colloquy in the Courtyard, in which he is, of course, strictly accurate. But Elizabethan *locale* was merely the matter of a placard, and I suggest that these events take on greater dread when they happen indoors,

as our modern stage permits. The essence of all this business is that it is a closet horror. The constantly shifting scenes at the end were too much cry for too little wool, a tableau of young gentlemen flicking lethargically at each other with battle-axes being frankly absurd. The final duel was lamentably ineffective ; Duncan's arrival was attended by a rally of enthusiastic Scots suddenly struck dumb ; Macbeth collogued with Banquo's murderer within two feet of half the court ; the bagpipes reminded one too insistently of tossing the caber at a Highland gathering at Braemar ; dummy apparitions rising belatedly from the cauldron irresistibly recalled an inexpert showman sending up Punch, Mr. Ketch, and others ; there was an entirely ludicrous procession of scul ions *à la* " Scheherazade " bearing sirloins, and suggesting that Macbeth's immediately ensuing " If it were done when 'tis done " had reference to the *pièce de résistance*. Lady Macbeth's " Was the hope drunk ? " etc., should not be accompanied by the skirl of pipes from the supper-room, punctuated by ejaculated " Heughs ! " Nor is there any earthly reason why the King's Evil speech should be retained. King James is dead. These things apart, the production is handsome if a trifle Christmassy.

With the greatest possible reluctance I must confess to not caring very greatly for Mr. Ainley's Macbeth. An auburn wig gave him the air of a Wagnerian tenor *un peu bête*, and his fullness of countenance and short beard a distinct likeness to a Van Dyck Charles the

First well in flesh. Mr. Ainley was never daemonic nor did he quite touch pathos. And then, possibly through nervousness, he gabbled. " My thought, whose murder yet is but fantastical," was reeled off as though the crime did not here first definitely present itself. By the way, shouldn't Gould's reading of " matter " for " murder " be adopted ? In the dagger speech the actor discounted his effect by playing with a palpable weapon before being startled by the impalpable one. A number of misplaced words and a sad bungle of the " Sleep no more ! " speech were obvious accidents. But this will not account for a perfunctoriness which can pass from " My way of life is fallen into the sere, the yellow leaf," to " I'll fight, till from my bones my flesh be hacked," without change of intonation. Mr. Ainley can play better than this, and I do not need persuading that he will be a different Macbeth in a week's time. But he must wake up, live the part instead of reciting it, and forget about Fluther Good and " not being derogatory." His best scenes were with the murderers and when confronted by his fit and the ghost of Banquo. Here Mr. Ainley really began to act.

Miss Thorndike, in robes which would have served equally for Portia or Cardinal Wolsey, grasped her nettle firmly, and achieved all expected things. She showed mind and commonsense in the intrigue, majesty at the banquet, and pathos at the end, though her night-gown was too elaborate. I never heard " The Thane of Fife had a wife " better said. But,

alas, that neither the lady nor her husband exhibited any sense of awe, superstition, poetry. They were not in touch with any world larger than themselves, and the tragedy which began at Dunsinane ended in the police-court of the Seddons.

Mr. Lewis Casson made an unimpressive, priggish Banquo, until after his death when suddenly he did terrifically as his ghost, being fearsomely uncoffined. Mr. Basil Gill was an extremely fine Macduff, and the Weird Sisters of Mr. Ivan Berlyn, Mr. Ronald Kerr, and Miss Zillah Carter bettered anything in my recollection. The performance began at a quarter to eight and lasted till much after eleven. Could not Malcolm's long speech of self-inculpation, a very *récit de Théramène* if ever there was one, be considerably shortened? And do we really need the old cobbler out of *Chu Chin Chow?* At the end Mr. Ainley blessed the audience and Miss Thorndike thanked everybody who has taken any part in the production except, of course, Shakespeare.

December 26.

Mr. Casson has speeded-up the production so that the tragedy is now concluded well within the three hours. But the curtain still descends some two and twenty times, which gravely disperses the interest instead of concentrating it. Mr. Casson's difficulty is that of all Shakespearean producers finding themselves in the quandary imposed upon the good lady whose business

in life was to manage Mr. Micawber. If the members of her family did *not* choose to place their money in Mr. Micawber's hands—which they didn't—what was the use of that ? If the public will not flock to see Shakespeare produced austerely and imaginatively—which they won't—what is the use of Elizabethan staging ? Compromise is indicated.

I suggest that the best compromise means one more act and fewer set scenes. Mr. Casson has chosen to present the play in three slices, running the first right up to the discovery of the murder and the second to include the sleep-walking scene. To my way of thinking no division could be unhappier. Consider how much the play gains by the use of four acts. The first act should be Shakespeare's, and end with Macbeth's decision to bend up each corporal agent, the rhymed tag about the false face hiding the false heart bringing the curtain down perfectly. The interval marks the passing of time, and the curtain rises again on Banquo's " How goes the night, boy ? " This act should in my opinion end with the flight of the sons, the small scene which follows being pure anti-climax. The third act has the magnificent opening : " Thou hast it now : King, Cawdor, Glamis, all." And after cutting most of that very dull patch about Malcolm's pretended misdeeds, the act ends with Macduff's new-found resolution. And I submit that whatever division be adopted the sleep-walking scene *must* be the beginning of the last act. Only so is the pattern preserved. Macbeth begins the play, and to him in immediate support comes

the stronger mind. Lady Macbeth's defeat by conscience is the murderer's last support, and its withdrawal should *immediately* precede his fall. The rest of the play should be all Macbeth, towering in his rage, impotence, and folly. He has forgotten his wife. Nor do we want a full parade of Malcolm's army, since all that it exists for is to allow of Macbeth's several magnificent entrances : " Hang out our banners," " They have tied me to a stake," and " Why should I play the Roman fool ? " In the matter of scenery I suggest that the best compromise would be, say, three or four scenes of maximum splendour, the rest to be done as barely and suggestively as possible.

My principal reason for visiting the play again was the conviction that Mr. Ainley was not at his best on the first night. On Thursday evening he gave us a great first act, or as great as his physical attributes permit. For this actor suffers in this part from his many perfections, including nobility of voice and serenity of countenance. Duncan calls the thane " noble Macbeth " and his lady believes him too kind. But that these are skin-deep qualities is hinted in Duncan's " There's no art to find the mind's construction in the face," uttered when that monarch is transferring absolute trust from one traitor to another. Macbeth has been likened to the second Richard. I cannot agree for the reason that his melancholy is felt as a simple man feels it and not tasted delicately, luxuriously, in the manner of the artist. If there must be comparison, should it not be with the third Richard, Macbeth's

regretful plaint about his way of life being Gloucester's " There is no creature loves me " all over again ? Macbeth is essentially bloody-minded, and he is a murderer from the beginning, though lacking the nerve to take the first step. He has resolved to murder Banquo and Fleance long before his wife's " In them nature's copy's not eterne," and she has no knowledge of the decision to annihilate Macduff and his family. Mr. Ainley never suggests a soul as black as this, largely owing to that quality of voice which fits him so admirably for Brutus. After all, you would not cast a light baritone as Mephistopheles. I repeat that Mr. Ainley on Thursday gave us a very fine first act, his nervous collapse after the murder being admirably done. But he did not keep it up. His second act fell away into the entirely unremarkable, and in the third he merely walked through his part, divesting the lines of power, beauty, and any kind of significance. It was as though he had taken " Out, out brave candle ! " literally, and voluntarily extinguished himself. I suggest that Mr. Ainley should hesitate before offering his admirers, among whom I count myself, a performance unworthy of his great reputation. There was more terror in the little finger of his Gauguin than in the whole of his Macbeth. Frankly, I am at a loss to understand this. Mr. Ainley has studied the part carefully. He uses the later folio reading of " our place " for " our peace " in the line " Whom we, to gain our peace, have sent to peace " ; and adopts Keightley's " on earth below " to fill in the dropped half-line after " Makes wing to the

rooky wood " and before " Good things of day begin to droop and drowse." One may not like these emendations, though they are evidence of careful reading. But it is surely the reverse of careful acting which omits " his hour " from the line about the poor player that struts and frets upon the stage.

Miss Thorndike's Lady Macbeth again seemed to me to be the best I have seen, and within the actress's physical means entirely perfect. Mrs. Siddons may have been more terrible, but I always suspect the good Sarah of a likeness to Mrs. Vincent Crummles. Not " standing on her head on the butt-end of a spear, surrounded by blazing fireworks," in which attitude Mr. Crummles first saw her, but sedate and even sepulchral as in *The Stranger*. Miss Thorndike is never sepulchral, and makes you sorry for the poor Queen—about whom there is nothing of Mrs. Haller. May I discreetly inquire why the sergeant who is faint with wounds is allowed to bawl his speech louder than any toastmaster ? Mr. Hubert Carter is much too good an actor to yield so readily to the temptation of overplaying.

January 2, 1927.

"Romeo and Juliet"

By WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE

Fellowship of Players

WE may think it a good job that Shakespeare delivered himself of *Romeo and Juliet* when he was a young man, for it is certain that in later life he neither could nor would have written it. This play is the only one of all the tragedies in which there is nothing tragic, since the catastrophe springs not from some defect in the protagonists but from the miscarriage of a letter. That schemes should gang agley is only tragic when there is something in mouse and man to prevent them. The tragic fault is not in the stars but in ourselves, a theory of dramatic art at which Shakespeare had possibly not arrived when he made this tragedy turn upon a defective postal service between Verona and Mantua. However, we need not quarrel about labels; enough that Shakespeare bagged this story in his youth and painted it with all the variable flowers of youthful poesy.

This immortal masterpiece roused Johnson to the most inept of his criticisms. "Here," he writes, "is

one of the few attempts of Shakespeare to exhibit the conversation of gentlemen, to represent the airy sprightliness of juvenile elegance." And again "Shakespeare's comic scenes are happily wrought, but his pathetic strains are always polluted, with some unexpected depravations. His persons, however distressed, *have a conceit left them in their misery, a miserable conceit.*" Worms as chambermaids, flesh wearied by the yoke of inauspicious stars, lips which seal bargains, poisons as pilots—it is good to know that in Johnson's opinion these conceits are miserable.

One's sympathies go out to any actress who is playing Juliet for the first time. If she is an actress of experience she must know that she will not look the part, and if she is a young girl her modesty must tell her that she cannot play it. Always there looms ahead that fearful potion speech, which so many inexperienced Juliets play with an amount of apprehension to combat a beetle and an endeavour to restore balance by cramming their mouths full of blanket. The mere knowledge of this terribly difficult passage has caused many a Juliet to break down long before she got to it. With the foreknowledge of this middle danger and the irretrievable woe enwrapping her at the end, Juliet has yet to begin by being gay. She is not an uncomplaining lamb like Hero, sad in the pastry sense like Mariana, or an unpractised silly like Cordelia and Desdemona. She belongs to a wittier and a livelier order of Shakespeare's heroines, and you feel that in jollier circumstances she would have put on the trews with Rosalind,

Imogen, and Viola. Juliet must steer between solemnity and the madcap spirits of Beatrice. She is a creature of banter and the sun, passing through pure love into the " rotten jaws of death." Her body is cloudy with innocence, yet her eyes are frank.

My only doubt about Miss Forbes-Robertson's Juliet concerns the extent of its relationship to Shakespeare's heroine. That the performance could only be one of greatest delicacy everybody who remembered her appearance in *Uncle Vanya* and later pieces must have been aware. This young actress possesses the extraordinary quality of knowing the last things about her art almost, you might think, before she has had time to learn the first. She has only to appear in any character and before she has crossed the stage you feel that you are in the presence of a spirit whose excess of fineness cannot escape the world's pain, of a soul importunate for things not of this earth and, in Herbert's phrase, " divinely loose " about her. It was said of Duse that her countenance in repose showed the ravages of past storms, and it might equally be said of this young actress that in her face is the foreknowledge of storms to come. On the spiritual side this Juliet was perfect. She was Sonya all over again, Sonya in all her truth, purity, loyalty, Sonya in hopeful love. This was a Juliet steel-true and blade-straight—the rustless steel of the untarnishable soul. Of such a Juliet as this Malherbe might have written :

> Et, rose, elle a vécu ce que vivent les roses,
> L'espace d'un matin.

For her death was not untimely. She had told all that we need ever know of innocence, and when at the end she bent over Romeo and took his head in her hands the gesture showed the tenderness and depth of feeling of the innocent who had passed through inviolacy into motherhood.

But Juliet has earthly values as well as spiritual ; the containing vessel is the lovely clay in whose perishable beauty is all the ache of the sonnets. Miss Forbes-Robertson showed us the white wonder of Juliet's soul, but we are to remember that Romeo bothered a good deal less about this than about the white wonder of his lady's hand. Is it possible that this Juliet breathed an air too rare, and that she would in the end have thoroughly disappointed a Romeo desiring less a goddess than a mistress who " when she walks, treads on the ground." Is it possible that Juliet was, in Gilbert's phrase, too " Francesca da Rimini, niminy-piminy " for a Romeo of the " pushing young particle, what's-the-next-article " sort ? Mr. Lawrence Anderson's Romeo did not belong to Shakespeare's world ; one felt that, like Archibald Grosvenor, he would have fittingly enlivened Verona's Saturday afternoons with a stick and a pipe and a half-bred black and tan. This was largely owing to a distressing make-up and a black wig which was the lawful adjunct of Second Murderers. Mr. Anderson can get beauty and to spare into his voice, but seems to banish it wilfully from his presence. Of this I am certain, that if Miss Forbes-Robertson is going to make an entire success of Juliet she must insist

upon a Romeo of fire and air inhabiting the same ethereal world. But as such Romeos are hard to come by, the young actress might be advised to read the text again with an eye to Juliet's purely human equality. Instead of twitting Paris before the Friar, she gave him mournful responses. Why, when the nurse says " See where she comes from shrift with merry look " should Juliet enter with a face longer than any fiddle ?

Mr. Robert Loraine was a manly Mercutio, Mr. D. A. Clarke-Smith proved his versatility by turning his and Mr. Shaw's entertaining Bloomfield Bonington into the least boring of Friars, and Mr. Ivan Berlyn contrived in the three minutes allotted to the Apothecary to play all but Juliet off the stage, most improperly diverting our sympathy from hero to druggist. In the even smaller part of Balthazar Mr. Carol Reed was exactly and Shakespeareanly right. Mr. Reginald Tate, who, as an amateur, gave a brilliant rendering of the principal part in Mr. Monkhouse's *The Conquering Hero*, made a first professional appearance as Paris. And a very nice little appearance too. The play was hacked and cut to fit into something like two and a half hours, to the happy annihilation of many of Johnson's " miserable conceits."

December 19.

"King Henry IV"

Part II

By WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE

O.U.D.S.

WHAT a piece of work is a theatrical producer! How noble in reason! In apprehension how like a god! But we must also remember the proverb which says that "nowt is so queer as folk." Unless, of course, it be a theatrical producer. Mr. Bridges Adams, in a finely creative piece of work which got the best out of play and players, made two of those mistakes which, like revoking at Bridge, happen only to the very simple or the very clever. What trembling newcomer to the great game of staging Shakespeare would have dared to deny the great speech beginning: "I do see the bottom of Justice Shallow"? Falstaff's hand is all trumps, but this soliloquy is the ace; and to leave out the "very genius of famine," and all that belongs to it, is to starve the part. Nothing in the theatre is more fantastic than the excuses your Shakespearean producer will make for omitting the best things. One has given up hope of ever hearing Hamlet's greatest soliloquy, the one beginning: "How all occasions do inform against

me " ; but I never thought not to hear about the cheese-paring and the forked radish. One understands that the time-factor was the trouble, and that Mr. Adams was anxious to have us out of the theatre by eleven o'clock. I submit respectfully that two minutes more would not have irked even the earliest Briton.

Then, again, the wilful misrepresentation of Feeble as a well set-up, lusty youth was one of those misplaced subtleties from which the stupid are immune. Just as in Beatrice Shakespeare anticipated Meredith's entire gallery of disdainful womanhood, so, in Feeble, he drew Mr. Polly three hundred years before Mr. Wells's hero was born. The stout soul in the shrinking frame, the little dyspeptic who goes to meet the bully armed only with his theory of " sufficient beauty "—what is this but Feeble's " We owe God a death ; I'll ne'er bear a base mind," all over again ? Subtlety will have it that Shakespeare, in giving the woman's tailor manly bearing, meant to get away from that simplicity of humour which called Wart ragged and made Bullcalf roar. But subtlety is wrong. For Falstaff, who has not heard Feeble's confession of faith, says straightforwardly : " And for a retreat ; how swiftly will this Feeble, the woman's tailor, run off ! " Mr. Bridges Adams may say that this is a small matter, and ask with Pistol whether etceteras are nothing. My point is that these were the only two blemishes in a production which was otherwise quite extraordinarily satisfying. Only a producer of genius aided by a company of Master Bettys could have made so much of the stage-direction :

" Enter Beadles, dragging in Hostess Quickly and Doll Tearsheet," or have differentiated between the ribaldry of that jeering crowd and the loyal transports of that which welcomes the new-made king. No playgoer has ever fathomed what those battles were about to which Feeble went so valiantly ; but the restoring of the war-scenes did have the effect of throwing the whole piece into the past. In the tavern scene it really did seem as though some Time-machine had carried us back to middle England and the dying Middle Ages.

It is curious how much of death there is in this fullest-blooded and most generous of English comedies. We owe God a death indeed, and here Shakespeare pays it for us royally. The King, the Justice, the woman's tailor, the great gormandiser who helped himself to Life as to some inexhaustible joint—the grave gapes for all of them. Yet not with menace ; it is still afternoon, though the shadows encroach upon the gold. Death is certain ; in the meantime there are bullocks at Stamford Fair. Stevenson could think of no work in which the end of life is represented with so nice a tact as in Dumas's *Le Vicomte de Bragelonne*, but we must suppose that he had forgotten Old Double and Falstaff's " Do not bid me remember mine end." It was in this scene that Time, having transported us to the year of grace fourteen hundred and thirteen, seemed to stand still. There must have been good producing and good acting here for us to feel, as we undoubtedly did feel, that we were in the same room with Falstaff and that the old man had yet to die. Yet to die, not in some

following batch of history, but in a year or two. He was alive before us, and we could not bear to think on his end. Neither could Shakespeare. " I have killed Porthos ! " said Dumas, rushing from his study with streaming eyes. But I submit that in sparing us Falstaff's dying the English poet showed the finer taste. Warwick says simply of Henry :

> He's walked the way of nature ;
> And to our purposes he lives no more.

That Falstaff must pass through nature to eternity we know, but his passing is not to our purpose. Hazlitt, discussing the essential meanness of the Prince's treatment of his old friend, said, " We speak only as dramatic critics." Of the unbearableness of the fat knight's end we speak as playgoers, not as philosophers.

The skill of Mr. Bridges Adams was again brilliantly shown in the management of his actors. Well may he have asked himself, in considering Mr. R. W. Speaight's claims upon the big part, how much a producer should care for the limb, the thews, the stature, bulk and big assemblance of a man. In *Peer Gynt* this young actor had shown us an apprehensive, quick and nimble spirit ; but there was nothing in his slight habit and petulant temper to suggest that he could play the slow-moving mountain even tolerably well. However, as all Oxford knows and one hopes London may some day see, Mr. Speaight confounded even his best friends. There was nothing of amateurishness in his performance, which was a piece of impersonation in the vein in which Coquelin understood that art. It was a triumph to stir

one so deeply alike at the words " I am old, I am old " and in the unutterable dumb dismay of the end, to give us not only the large stomach but the brain in which it " snows of meat and drink." There was a spirit went out of this great creature to lard the Warwickshire earth —which is what all good Falstaffs must do—and Oxford should be proud of their young player. Easier to do, but still difficult enough, is the dying King, and here Mr. H. Grisewood acquitted himself very finely, again without trace of amateurishness, and having sufficient instinct for beauty left over from the big speeches to seize upon such a gem as

> O Westmoreland, thou art a summer bird,
> Which ever in the haunch of winter sings
> The lifting up of day.

One thought that Mr. Franklin rather overplayed Shallow, who should be lean and slippered yet not quite Pantaloon. Nevertheless, it was on its lines an excellent performance which showed feeling for the stage. Contrariwise, the royal progeny of Messrs. L. A. Nye, D. R. Tidy, D. B. Buckley, and P. Pryor were all under-played, being so many walking advertisements for modesty. Mr. D. B. Buckley's Bardolph was capital, and I think I spy an actor in Mr. G. E. Williams, who gave the small part of Morton very well indeed. Miss Clare Greet and Miss Olga Lindo played the tavern ladies as they should be played, and not otherwise ; and I hope they will not take this scanty mention as a slight. They could not have been bettered in all London, but I am writing about the O.U.D.S.

One would say a word for the extremely intelligent inter-playing of the whole company. Brilliantly indeed did these young wits get themselves into the bodies of these old men. Mr. H. Temple Abady provided incidental music of great delight and charm. Altogether a very notable performance, suggesting that Oxford Shakespeare, like her spires, anthologies, and marmalade, is a thing to dream about.

February 14.

"The Shoemaker's Holiday"

By THOMAS DEKKER

The "Old Vic"

"BUT for that *wireless favourite*, 'Drink to Me Only,' Jonson and all his works had passed into the limbo of forgotten things." Thus a recent paragraph. Next day I discovered Dekker in a cross-word puzzle. So, you see, Time brings its revenge. Or is it that despite the heaped complexities of mechanical invention mind in the last resort is entertained only by mind? There is a kind of poetic inevitability in this return to the age of Elizabeth. The maddest motorist has only to career England long enough to strike Stratford in the end.

Comparatively little is known about Thomas Dekker except that he was a hack-writer of whom Jonson, Webster, Ford, and others made use. Nearly all that we know of him is taken from Henslowe's *Diary*, in which there are allusions to advances made on account of work to be done. Dekker is described by one authority as "possessing all the thriftlessness and pecuniary

shamelessness of Micawber." But at least he did the work for which he had been paid ! *The Shoemaker's Holiday* proves that, like Dickens, Dekker possessed the common touch. Here again are the humour and pathos, the relish for absurdity and the vein of sentiment. Both had the eye for an odd character, and both took delight in showing good-nature peeping through the holes in rascality's blanket. Dickens's scullions may have more brains, but Firk, the journeyman shoemaker, has the root of their grey matter. The play is really all about caste. A king is introduced to do honour to a master-craftsman, and the son of the rich merchant makes honourable amends to a common soldier. " Who'd 'ave thought the long swell 'ad it in 'im ? " is written on the countenance of Firk, new-enlightened after the manner of Sam Gerridge.

We can imagine how all this must have pleased Elizabethan groundlings, and we must recognise that the theme of this comedy is equally near to the general heart to-day. Essential equality of the fashioners of things with the fashionables who use them, admitted subservience in the matter of the touched wage and forelock—this conspiracy of social inferiority is still an integral part of right-minded labour's mental make-up. Recent years have retaught the world, if indeed the world had ever forgotten, that Jack is as good as his master in such major things as dying for his country, or hating to find his woman another's. As good, too, in the minor matter of untutored wit. Note honest Firk's retort when the Lord Mayor takes him for a knave—

"No knave, sir, but Firk, the shoemaker, lusty Roger's chief lusty journeyman, hoping your worship is in good health as I was at the making of these shoes, I bid you farewell, yours, Firk." This is not only Sam Gerridge but Sam Weller, and the rapturous delight with which the sally was received by the "Old Vic." audience proved its kinship with the enduring wit of London streets. Cockaigne is a country which never changes, and Firk is a constant feature in its landscape. In this character Dekker owes nothing to any other dramatist, and it is obvious that for it he went straight to life. One feels a little differently about Simon Eyre, the mad shoemaker, who is a hurly-burly of a man compounded in equal parts of Falstaff and Pistol. The play was published about the same time as *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, and it is impossible not to think that for his principal character Dekker went a-borrowing.

The piece was put on as well as need be, and was very well played. First there was the Simon Eyre of Mr. Baliol Holloway, who gave us all there is in the part. This actor's Falstaff is a whole feast, but this was at least a sufficient meal. Then Mr. Horace Sequeira played Firk with a great deal of ingenuity; this is a comedian of promise. Mr. John Garside was good as Hodge, and Mr. Neil Porter as Ralph, the wounded soldier, put extraordinary passion into the scene in which he rediscovered his wife by means of her old shoe. But throughout the whole play Mr. Porter contrived to wear that shining look with which St. Dunstan's and other hospitals have made us familiar,

and to suggest in his voice trials bravely endured. " Are we downhearted ? " is a cry as old as Agincourt. As Henry V. Mr. William Monk bore himself royally and well, but would perhaps do even better if he did not appear to be quite so tickled by his part. One does not want an English king to remind one too insistently of Miss Norma Talmadge in *Smiling Through.*

Remains Miss Evans, who found Margery Eyre a sketch of a part, and turned it into a complete woman. One would describe the versatility of this actress as amazing if it were not that one has become entirely used to it. Miss Evans has this characteristic of great acting—that she takes hold of her dramatist's conception, absorbs it, and then gives it out again re-created in terms of her own personality and delighted imagination, so that you get the twofold joy of one fine talent superimposed upon another. " How shall I look in a hood ?" asks the new-enriched dame, to be answered, " Like a cat in the pillory." Whereupon Margery has the astonishing, irrelevant, " Indeed, all flesh is grass." Hear Miss Evans say this, mark the relish with which she passes absurdity under your nose in the manner of a connoisseur extolling old brandy—note this, and you reflect, first, that Dekker was a good playwright, and, second, that the best wit in the world gains when it is delivered by a witty actress.

It is not pretended that the audience at this theatre is composed of anything but simple, middle-class people. Well, here is the play for them. Watching it, and noting how the wage-earning spirit of the late six-

teenth century called to the wage-earning spirit of the early twentieth, one realised that there is an unchanging England which does not know serfdom and ignores plutocracy. We cannot tell what the curled gallants and scented ladies of Dekker's day thought about this piece. Perhaps, taking a leaf out of the modern book, they didn't visit it.

March 28.

Foreign Plays

"The Plough and the Stars"

A Play by SEAN O'CASEY

Fortune Theatre

THIS piece contains that greatness which is something different from the sum of small perfections. The strength of a beam is measured by its weakest part, of a man by his strongest. Greatness in a man and in a work of art is a matter not of faults but of excellences, and of a pervading spirit. The world, people say, has been too full of tragic scenes in these recent years for us to welcome them on the stage. But tragedy is unescapable both in this work and in the mind which conceived it. *The Plough and the Stars* is the outcome of a spirit strongly moved by the events which happened in Dublin between November, 1915, and the following Easter. Its personages are the rag, tag and bobtail of the Dublin slums, shiftless of character and romantic of temperament, great phrasemakers and soil for the most grandiose flowers of speech. Yet what a lot they are if we stop to consider them dispassionately! Consider Fluther Good, the drunken carpenter, whose

abhorrence of the " derogatory " is only equalled by his knack of falling into it ; Young Covey, the fitter, who has a passion for Communism in the abstract and a practical taste in plunder and loot ; Clitheroe, the bricklayer, whose patriotism and personal ambition are like a pair of horses pulling away from one another ; Peter Flynn, the mindless labourer, eternally maundering about the grave of some patriot of long ago ; Mrs. Gogan, the charwoman, with a ghoulish delight in all the appurtenances of death and burial ; Bessie Burgess, the fruit-vendor, with vileness on her tongue and something that is not vileness in her heart ; Rosie Redmond, street walker and pure pragmatist.

But it is the business of the dramatist to consider passionately, to abound so much in sympathy for his creatures that they take on life. Mr. O'Casey has done what Balzac and Dickens did—he has created an entirely new gallery of living men and women. These projections of his imagination live, and live with such an urgency and veracity that you feel moral censure to be impertinent. You may be appalled, but you do not blame ; these people are alive, and you refrain from judging them. But it would be a mistake to think that this piece is gloomy throughout. It isn't. It moves to its tragic close through scenes of high humour and rich, racy fooling, about which there is something of Elizabethan gusto. Young Covey roars his gospel of economic regeneration with the emphasis of Pistol ; there is a Falstaffian ring about Fluther, mercurial excitability taking the place of the lethargic sweep ; old

Flynn is Shallow all over again ; and Rosie is pure Doll. It may be that the first two acts are something meandering, and that at the end of them we feel that though we have been tremendously amused the piece has not got sufficiently under way. This is largely owing to the fact that Mr. O'Casey's people talk too much and not sufficiently dramatically. In the printed version of the piece the speeches read magnificently, because the eye, having the power to dwell, may linger long enough for the mind to take them in. But with the ear the case is different. Many of Mr. O'Casey's sentences are too long, too much involved and too parenthetical to be easy of apprehension. For example :

> " Take your rovin' lumps o' hands from pattin' th' bassinette, if you please, ma'am ; an', steppin' from th' threshold of good manners, let me tell you, Mrs. Burgess, that it's a fat wondher to Jennie Gogan that a lady-like singer o' hymns like yourself would lower her thoughts from sky-thinkin' to sthretch out her arm in a sly-seekin' way to pinch anything dhriven asthray in th' confusion of th' battle our boys is makin' for th' freedom of their country ! "

I submit that it is impossible for any actress to deliver this effectively. The play is full of chunks of mere verbiage which remind one of the journalist who applied for a post as leader-writer. " What's your line ? " asked the editor. " Invective," replied the applicant. " Invective about what ? " pursued the editor. " Nothing in particular," was the reply, " just invective." Yet Mr.

O'Casey can make his people come to the point as when the charwoman says to her lady-friend : " You mind your own business, ma'am, and stupify your foolishness by gettin' dhrunk." It may even be that these first two acts put you in mind of the justification of the Scotchman for eating a dish of singed sheep's head. " *Dish*, Sir, do you call that a dish ? " asked the Englishman. " Dish or no dish," rejoined the Scotchman, " there's a deal o' fine confused feedin' aboot it, let me tell you." Despite the confusion there is a fine dramatic meal in this play. There is a magnificent passage in the public-house, in which the officers of the Citizen Army pledge themselves to imprisonment, wounds and death. They go out, and then Rosie and Fluther enact a scene of dalliance which might be a pendant to the amours of the fat knight and his mistress.

The terror and suspense of the Third Act are masterly. Death is in the house, in the street outside, and in the mind. In the room is the coffin containing the child whom we have seen wasted by consumption ; at its foot the familiar riff-raff are playing cards. In the next room is Nora Clitheroe, who has lost her newborn baby and her reason, and does not yet know of her husband's death. In one corner is Bessie asleep and worn out with sacrifice and vigil, in another is Clitheroe's second-in-command relating the commandant's miserable end and how the General has described it as a " beam of glory." The English soldiery are about, and next door there is a sniper. Nora goes to the window and Bessie, dragging her

away, is shot. The curtain descends upon the soldiery drinking tea.

Miss Sara Allgood, Miss Maire O'Neill, Mr. Arthur Sinclair and Mr. Sydney Morgan have never acted better. Miss Eileen Carey, who played the immensely difficult part of Nora, is perhaps not a highly accomplished actress at present, though she may become one.

May 16.

"The Government Inspector"

A Comedy by GOGOL

Barnes Theatre

THE young man will be witty presently," said somebody to Doctor Johnson. "Sir," replied the great man, "I can wait." But the theatre is not a waiting-room, and the fun must be here and now. When the curtain came down on the first act of this revival there arose such a hubbub of disappointment and dismay as Barnes and Mr. Ridgway, Gogol and Mr. Komisarjevsky can seldom have experienced. People who remembered Mr. Moscovitch's production of this farce went about the foyer with streaming eyes protesting how much they had laughed on that earlier occasion; others alleged a performance of some humour at Prague. But Prague and the war are a long way off, and Gogol's farce in that dull hour between eight and nine on Wednesday evening last seemed to be the dampest of squibs.

Yet the play should be good enough. A village community, seething in a happy stew of bribery and cor-

ruption, hears through a postmaster who opens everybody's letters that it is to receive a surprise visit from a Government Inspector. A young ne'er-do-well passing through in his travels is at once accepted as the inspector by the credulous peasants, who proceed to shower upon him honour, entertainment, and the roubles necessary to ensure his good opinion. After cleaning out the village the charming fellow rides away, having previously despatched a letter in which he describes the spoiling of the innocents. The letter is read by the postmaster to the assembled dupes. Consternation is rife, when suddenly a soldier appears announcing the arrival of the real Government Inspector. *C'est le comble.* This is calamity's true heel, and the peasants, bereft of their resources, know that they are for grinding into powder. Tongues cease their wagging ; it is upon dumb, driven cattle that the curtain descends.

It may be argued that these simple humours, dear to the Russian mind because they arise out of a state of affairs familiar to that country, should be looked at from the Russian standpoint. This is a sound argument. For the English spectator the play obviously cannot contain any of those delightsome correspondencies relating the things shown to us by the dramatist to the things we know out of our own experience. We should not expect a Russian critic to animadvert upon Mr. Hardy's *Under the Greenwood Tree* because in the steppes there are no organ-lofts in which moujiks play the bass-fiddle. We should ask a Russian critic to put himself in Mr.

Hardy's place. Mr. Komisarjevsky, who is responsible for the production at Barnes, seems to have distrusted our faculty for putting ourselves in Gogol's place. The art of the comedian, a French wit has said, consists in giving " un sens charmant à ce qui n'en a pas," and Mr. Komisarjevsky in this instance seems to have taken a similar view of the function of the producer. Hence the expressionist idiom at its most frenzied. Hence the return in this piece to the humanity of Mr. Balieff's toy-soldiers.

But I submit that you cannot have your cake and eat it, that you cannot believe like a child and at the same time taste the quaintness of childhood and revel in " the idea of " the child-mind. The babe on the hearth-rug believes in the bear lurking in the shadow by the table-leg ; the grown-up who goes down on his knees may believe in the babe, but he will not believe in the bear. The delight in Mr. Komisarjevsky's setting is one of pure sophistication, whereas to enjoy the story which it adorns one must put off sophistication. Would a Russian agricultural labourer who knows Gogol's world make much of human beings walking, not as he knows men to walk, but jigging to the puppet-rhythm of Mr. Balieff ? I doubt it. You may say that a London West End audience is not composed of agricultural labourers, Russian or other, and that this old piece is insufficiently entertaining to the modern mind without new-fangled methods of presentation. Then why produce it at all ? It is not possible for anybody to admire the best of Mr. Komisarjevsky's work more

than I do. Nobody has been louder in his praise, and in discussing his art I have frequently used the word genius. That being so, I feel that I am free to express the opinion that his present production, though clever and amusing in itself, in relation to Gogol was wholly mischievous. In fact, it killed the play stone-dead. The characters had to mount a rostrum which behaved like a merry-go-round at a fair. Now, if the spectator likes this, all well and good—enjoyment is the test. But let him be sure that he really does like it and is not being bluffed by a mode of the hour and recollection of Mr. Komisarjevsky's prowess in Tchehov. For myself, I fell to wondering what I should feel if I saw a production in Moscow of my old favourite *Caste*, in which the little house at Stangate was mounted upon, and the characters spoke from, a spinning teetotum.

The talents of the actors at Barnes, I suggest, hardly fit them for supreme success in this play. Only a company every member of which, besides possessing a genius for drollery, should be in himself a droll could make very much of Gogol. Drollery is not a thing to be compassed by taking thought ; either Nature has made your comedian irresistible or she hasn't. Upon one character only in the large cast had the genuine comic fire descended, and that was the Jew pedlar whom the programme did not help me to identify. The other actors did competently, but competence was not enough. Mr. Rains and Mr. Clark acted cleverly and even brilliantly, forcing your acknowledgment of their cleverness and brilliance. But this in itself was the mark

of something less than complete success; the mind should have been revelling in the rich humanity of these Russians rather than in the skill and propriety with which the English actors went about imitating it. It must be said that the second and third acts went very much better than the first. This for two reasons. First, because Gogol improves in its later stages. Second, because the mind, having got over the expressionist shock, settled down to extract some fun out of its amazement. After all, you have only to live with a thing long enough to find some charm in it.

May 2.

"The Three Sisters"

A Play by ANTON TCHEHOV

Barnes Theatre

THERE were many wonderful pieces of stage craft in Mr. Theodore Komisarjevsky's production of *The Three Sisters*. The first was the setting of the opening scene half in and half out of the drawing-room in the house of Prozorovus. On the verandah steps mope and pine the sisters. Each has her moment of self-revelation so complete that henceforward you wear her melancholy as though it were your own. Olga has "over-stood her market," to use the phrase which aroused so much scorn and pity in Lamb's bosom. Masha knows only the tedium of marriage, the bright genius of her girlish admiration having turned punctilious pedagogue. Irina is bemused in a shining dream ; the decent young lieutenant who loves her is not her knight. Sad Graces are these three, beset by the mortal weariness of life in a provincial town and longing for distraction, excitement, work even, and all that life in a capital city might mean. Moscow is the

Mecca of that pilgrimage upon which they are doomed never to set out. Behind the frame-work of the verandah the everyday life of the house goes on. The old Army doctor, who loved the sisters' mother, philosophises, drinks, and reads his eternal newspapers. There is the moody brother, half poet and half reprobate, who is to marry Natasha, the pretentious, chattersome slattern. There is the lieutenant's friend, Solyony, whose presence bodes evil, and last there is the Colonel who reads Kant to relieve the tedium of battery-commanding, and because he is tired of his wife makes love to Masha.

You might say broadly that nothing happens throughout the first two acts, but the truth is that hundreds of things have happened, so that you know this life as though it were that of your own family. Tchehov is never afraid of irrelevance. He will hold up the argument while the old doctor explains to Irina that his watch is a repeater. The detail has no significance, yet its happening brings with it a sudden realisation, just as the ticking of a clock striking upon an ear grown too accustomed arouses in the hearer a sense of passing time, spinning worlds, and the fates of men hanging in the balance. There is another astonishing moment in the second act when Irina is left alone in the house. It is some fête-day, and among the mummers who now appear is the bodeful Solyony. The others are dismissed, but he remains a hooded figure of we know not what evil. The girl is terrified, and we feel it would have gone ill with her but for the timely arrival of a

sister. But it is in the third act that Mr. Komisarjevsky most finely reinforces Tchehov's genius. There is a fire in the village and the sisters are assembled in their bedroom, which is really two rooms, one behind the other and divided by a partition. For a time there is some business of looking out old clothes for those who have been burnt out of home. It draws late, and the sisters, moved perhaps by the clanging of the fire-bell, unbosom themselves of their woes. Masha must confess her love-affair, to which Olga will not listen, and Irina with her arms entwined about her sisters bursts into a storm of weeping. The grouping here is pyramidal, and it is as much the visual effect as the skill of the words which gives an effect of dolour such as may not be compassed by the précis-writer. To those who may not find much matter for heart-searching here one can only say : go and see the play.

After a little while Masha steals to her lover, and is not to be found by her husband. Then comes an astonishing thing. What you might call the front bedroom is empty; behind the partition Olga and Irina are going to bed. The younger sister's flood of passion is not yet stilled, and as you listen to the last of its ebb you see the giant shadows of these two figures of grief thrown by the candle upon the upper wall and ceiling. So much for production. The last act is, perhaps, the finest in the way of play writing. Irina's lover, to whom she promised not love but faithfulness, is shot by Solyony. The regiment is departing, and to the distant playing of the band Masha takes farewell of the

Colonel. She is surprised by her husband, who, though a pedagogue, has understanding and compassion. Then comes a great stroke. The schoolmaster has taken a false beard from one of the boys, and puts it on so that his clowning may give Masha time to recover countenance. This is the way of pardon, and the mingling of *grotesquerie* and pathos has a touch of the sublime. In this play the poetic and the commonplace are curiously mingled. The birch trees on one side of the house are for apostrophising, on the other side hangs out the clothing of Natasha's babies ; a perambulator is wheeled between. This is the play of Tchehov which arouses in at least one spectator the least impatience. One is not tempted to ask, with Mrs. Crupp, why the characters don't take to skittles, "and so divert the mind." One doesn't prescribe golf for these ailments. Whereas I must confess to a feeling that a round a day would have done Uncle Vanya a world of good. But then it is possible that the play of that name is the least good of all Tchehov's, whereas to my mind *The Three Sisters* stands easily first. The date is 1872, and the dressing sets the emotions back in time and indicates a world which is no more.

The piece was acted admirably, and it is only lack of space which prevents me from appending a very long list of names. Two performances were entirely remarkable. The first was the Masha of Miss Margaret Swallow, about whom there were astonishing suggestions—I am indebted to a colleague for the fancy that Marguerite Gautier was among them—besides

that of the Russian elegance which has passed away. Second was the Irina of Miss Beatrix Thomson, a piece of acting of great accomplishment.

February 21.

"Katerina"

A Play by LEONID ANDREYEV

Barnes Theatre

THE point is whether, if Emilia had snatched the pillow away in time, Desdemona would have been driven into the arms of Cassio out of resentment, disillusion, what you will. And, after Cassio, the "general camp," to use Othello's phrase. We say no, stoutly and for lots of reasons, but principally because we are English, and Shakespeare was an English dramatist who worked in normal passions. White heat of jealous rage, fiery incandescence of poet's mind—these did not affect the matter of normality. Elizabethan gold remained gold whatever the temperature, and, though Shakespeare could destroy Othello, he could never degrade Desdemona. But times have changed, and the day is with the neurologist turned playwright. At least it would appear to be so in Russia.

We must not be too English if we would get the best out of these studies of a way of life so utterly foreign and antipathetic to our own. "Fool, who believes that he is not I!" cried Hugo. Oh, wad some power the giftie gie us to see these Russians as

they see themselves ! Everything that happens to Andreyev's characters is repugnant to the English sense of what would, should, or could happen to people laying claim to ordinary, *i.e.*, English sanity. This being so, the temptation is to cast about for excuses, to pity Russia for having been left out of the Roman march, and so passing from barbarism to decadence without knowing civilisation, or to talk about " retrogressive metamorphism " and the way this country has been steadily breaking Europe down ever since, in the time of Peter the Great, she first began to absorb European culture. Or we may just shake our head and talk about calling in the alienist. But surely it is putting the cart before the horse to be quick with the excuse and tardy with the acceptance. Let us grant Andreyev the truth and probability of his characters, the sex obsession, the maundering delight in debauch, the maudlin itch for fine living and thinking—maudlin because it is as drunkard's chatter, unbacked by intention—the morbid delight in revolvers and six-storey windows as means of compassing death. Granted these things, how shall we English best find enjoyment in a play which sets them forth ?

Well, the first thing to do is not to arrive late, since within ten seconds of the rise of the curtain the whole matter is set forth in a way which only a master of the theatre could devise. The stage is empty. We hear a fearful din going on in the next room, and not only know what the quarrel is about, but divine that a husband is at that point in rage at which Othello has his

fit of epilepsy. A wife rushes across the stage, followed by a husband, who fires his revolver three times and misses. As his fit subsides, hers grows. And at once we know that two Russians being scratched, two Tartars are revealed—the male still a savage beneath his veneer, the female one of those exotic, hyper-æsthetic creatures who are all sensibility and no sense. She is a Russian, and we may look to her for cold and calculated revenge. But there is to be more to it than that. How much more we must wait to see, for Andreyev devotes the rest of the act to ensuring the actuality of his characters and putting them into their furniture and surroundings. So, while Katerina is dressing herself and the children preparatory to leaving the house, we are made to realise that even a husband who has failed to shoot his wife at one o'clock in the morning has still to sleep somewhere. Therefore we see Georg's mother interrupting her floods of tears to fuss about with blankets. Then comes a wonderful touch.

The children's governess, bored at having to get up in the middle of the night, enters to obtain some instructions, and, of course, can get nothing out of Georg, who is on his knees, with his mother's arms round him. So she shrugs her shoulders and goes out again. This it is which puts the chairs and tables round these tragic creatures. They may be mad, but we know that they live in a world of method, where, besides loving and hating, people must also eat and drink and sleep. This is great playwriting, since it connotes the world we

know, in which though tears are ridiculous and dying is ugly tragedy is believed. Contrast the unrealities of Sheik drama, alleged by us to be about normal people, where lovers swoon from morn to midnight without mention of a chop, or die on sofas uttering sublimities with nobody believing a word.

Having made us accept his world and his people, Andreyev then proceeds to develop his thesis, which is that the fall of Katerina's pride and vanity has brought the whole woman toppling down. The second act shows us Katerina languishing on the verandah in her mother's house. She has given herself to the nonentity, Mentikov, who was the object of her husband's unfounded suspicions. She regards her lover now with the utmost distaste, and as we view this beautiful creature adrift among her dimly-guessed passions we think of a fair ship at the mercy of winds and waves. For Miss Frances Carson does make Katerina a beautiful creature—there can be no doubt about that. Whether we quite believe that the injury sustained would have turned into utter trash a good woman who had no precedent taint is, perhaps, not the point. Our own poet has told us that " lilies that fester smell far worse than weeds," and perhaps we may think that they also decay faster. But as yet degeneration has hardly begun, and the mood is no more than one of exquisite melancholy. Miss Carson looked very lovely and very Russian here, her dress being so devised as to suggest something bruised and violated ; and she played the scene of reconciliation with the husband with great

finesse and understanding. The kisses which she gives are almost from another world, since we feel that the soul of her who gives them is dead. The act ends with a fine piece of " theatre." Katerina goes within doors, and on the piano plays to Georg, who remains sitting in the sunlight, something remembered from their courtship days. The piece is Debussy's " Plus que lente." The atmosphere of subtle melancholy is rudely broken by Mentikov, who proffers fearsome banalities, to which Georg hardly replies. Then he offers a cigarette, and by accepting the husband conveys the measure of his contempt. The curtain comes down.

The third act brings on the scene a *raisonneur*, a painter named Koromislov, whom we, not being Russian, should simply call a cad. For though he has been one of Katerina's increasing number of lovers, we find him lecturing both wife and husband. He advises Katerina to throw herself out of his studio window, which she very nearly does, and suggests to Georg that his best atonement for having missed his wife is to take better aim at himself. The fourth act shows a supper party in the studio. Here we see Katerina posing as Salome and drunk with wine, the flattery of the men about her, and her own desires. The picture of degeneracy is complete. Not only Katerina's degeneracy, but also that of Georg, for the husband has now plumbed the depths of complaisance. He takes affectionate leave of Katerina, as she goes off with the soberest of her lovers. The party breaks up, and

once more Mentikov offers a cigarette to Georg, who is lost in thought. This time he sketches a refusal, and we know that he is debating whether he shall strangle Katerina or shoot himself, or both. The play might seem sordid here if the scene had not been contrived by Andreyev with so much ingenuity and invention, and produced by Mr. Komisarjevsky with so much virtuosity. To get the supper party and the piano playing, the posing and painting on to the ten-foot stage, and delight the eye with movement and grouping, was a miracle in itself. But Mr. Komisarjevsky achieves more than this ; it is a whole web of sight and sound which he presents, so that the play becomes an orchestrated score. This is beauty in which dramatist and producer have an equal hand, and I am not convinced that beauty can demoralise. Or, if we must grant the thematic material to be sordid, we must also admit that sordidness is shown for what it is. The fall of wife and husband does not obscure the heights from which they fell. Thinking on our own smart comedies, in which the deject are not thrown down from anywhere but just grovel about as though mud were the jolliest, and even the only, state of existence imaginable—reflecting on some recent English plays we are chastened. Consolation comes from thinking that perhaps our comedies are not intended to be more than make-believe, whereas this Russian tragedy is real life. Item, in real life an English husband would probably have neither gone in for nor messed up the shooting, but would certainly

have made a success of booting his wife's lovers out of door.

Miss Carson was excellent throughout, except, perhaps, at the end of the third act, where Andreyev makes her get down from the window-sill, decline from suicide, put on her gloves, and go home. Katerina has a flood of uneasy flippancies to deliver here, and the scene must be very difficult. But why did Mr. Komisarjevsky consent to that tasteless last-act costume? A Russian woman like Katerina would have devised for Salome something that did not suggest the cabaret. Ineluctable is not a word one uses every day, but it has to be used about Mr. John Gielgud's Georg. The wretch never could have got away from his tragedy. Mr. Gielgud is becoming one of our most admirable actors; there is mind behind everything he does. Only he must avoid the snag of portentousness, of being intense about nothing in particular. Twice in this play he has to make an entry upstairs from below stage. The first time is an occasion of great solemnity, but on the second he is merely paying a friendly call, to do which it is unnecessary to put on the manner of one rising from the grave. Lots of people were frightfully good, Mr. Ernest Milton playing the painter with so much authority that one lost contempt for the character. Perhaps there is even a certain majesty in a pot which can call two kettles black.

April 3.

"A Month in the Country"

A Comedy by IVAN S. TURGENEV

Translated by M. S. MANDELL

Royalty Theatre

GEORGE CALDERON tells us that the Western stage play is *centripetal*, the attention being concentrated upon a group of individuals. The Russian drama he declares to be *centrifugal*, the object being to draw the mind away from the particular events to contemplation of life in general. Such a dramatic philosophy is akin, we are to understand, to that modern theory of physics which does not look to subordinate matter for the last word, but regards it as a break in the continuity of the superior ether. The actors must show by different tone and gesture whether they are speaking to the action or to the atmosphere, the alternation of action-line and atmosphere-line being sometimes so rapid that the surface of a Russian play becomes as rough as that of a French "vibrationist" picture seen close at hand.

Shall we say more simply that these Russians,

instead of depicting extraordinary persons in extraordinary situations, present ordinary people in ordinary conditions ? Their plays exhibit no impossibly romantic world in the throes of unheard-of dilemmas, quandaries, concatenations. But there is this further difference. The Russian realist, inviting subjection of the spectator's mood, consents that he shall still remain master of his intelligence ; the English romancer insists upon surrender not only of mood, but of mind. A Tchehov, writing about a cheque-destroying lady, would have told us not only the last things about Mrs. Cheyney, but also the first, so that the action, diminishing in importance, would have been sunk in the background of character. To an English playwright, writing for the light-hearted amusement of an English audience, the matter presents itself differently. A cheque for ten thousand pounds is a thesis in itself, and to witness its tearing up is to be in at an emotional and dramatic event, by whomsoever it is torn up, and for whatsoever reason. The action, and not the character, is the material thing ; the gap in Nature is the lady herself, who does not really exist. Whereas these Russian characters, who do so little, are as much alive as the people next door.

In his introduction to the printed edition of his plays Turgenev said modestly that he did not perceive in himself dramatic talent. The first act of *A Month in the Country* is sufficient confutation. Let me admit that I am not sufficiently familiar with the Russian theatre to know whether in the 'sixties or 'seventies its more

advanced spirits deemed the presentation of uncertain mood and imperfect consciousness to be acceptable as drama. The year of Turgenev's deprecatory preface was the last year of the run in this country of *Our Boys*. Tom Robertson's milk jug had scarcely done waving, and London had still to wait ten years for the comparatively explicit *Doll's House*. Whatever, then, Moscow and St. Petersburg may have thought of Turgenev's tenuous atmospherics, it is certain that contemporary English taste would have made little of them.

But we have definitely changed all that, and thanks to the plays of Tchehov we can now understand this comedy of Turgenev. To our awakened sense nothing could be more dramatic than the first act of this play. The drawing-up of the curtain discloses one of those melancholy, sun-lit verandahs with which Mr. Komisarjevsky has made us familiar. In a corner at the back is one of those groups which we know so well. It contains an old lady who is probably the mother of the owner of the house, a female of uncertain age and aspect who may be companion or governess, a nondescript male who could be a steward. These three are quarrelling over a game of cards which we know is being played without stakes.

Nearer the audience is another little group containing two persons only. One, who is the lady of the house, is sewing. She is virtuous, discontented, and unhappy, dependent upon, yet not returning the love of the poor fish who sighs aloud, rather than reads,

passages from a French novel. Natalia is *distraite*, and does not listen. Then occurs an astonishing piece of stage craft. Natalia tells Rakitin that, without consulting him—which "places" their relationship—she has engaged for her son a new tutor who looks like becoming a famous man. Rakitin says his curiosity is aroused, and Natalia has a rather scornful "Really?" She bids Rakitin read on, and immediately interrupts him to ask where Viera is. And at once we know that the play is to be about the passion inspired by the tutor in an elder and a younger woman. In quick succession we are shown the unconscious stirring of first-love in Viera, Natalia's manœuvring for position after the manner of Fielding's Lady Booby, with all that is grotesque in such a passion softened into pathos, and the complete indifference of the young man. In the meantime an intermediary has arrived with a proposal for Viera's hand. The suitor is wildly impossible, and at first Natalia, who has some kindness for her god-daughter and realises that she is still only a child, scouts the idea. But presently, having some jealous inkling how the land lies, she goes into lunch on the intermediary's arm, telling him that she will think the proposition over.

This is perfect writing for the stage. The play is as well made as though it concerned nothing in particular. The subtlety throughout is extraordinary, and Turgenev pays our minds a compliment by leaving the most important things unsaid. Natalia's anguish in declining self-respect, Viera's transition from the child

to the woman who knows that her life will never be lived—these things have no words, yet they move us deeply. Ultimately both Rakitin and the tutor go away, leaving Viera to her loveless marriage and Natalia to the house which the presence of her well-meaning husband makes all the emptier. There is no climax, but, then, why should there be ? A gentle melancholy suffuses this piece, and, like Shelley's wave, gives an " intenser day " to all that it envelops. Possibly we are inclined to take this sadness a little more seriously than the Russians intend. For at the last, when we expect our feelings to be most lacerated, lo and behold the piece takes a comic twist. Fun is poked not only at Rakitin and the tutor, but also at two other characters, all of whom are said to be running away like partridges because they are afflicted with some notion of honesty. That which we should call a tragedy Turgenev calls a comedy, and we reflect that Tchehov intended *The Cherry Orchard* to be played as farce.

Frankly may one suggest that the " vibrationist " theory of acting is all rather nonsense, and that the best kind in the art with which we are familiar will do for any of the Russians ? All that is necessary is the absence of a star-actor and the refusal of the company, whenever the star opens his mouth, to suspend animation like a golf crowd watching Hagen drive off the last tee with a four for the championship. The piece was admirably produced, and acted with great intelligence if with something less than the proper intensity. As Natalia and Viera Miss Gillian Scaife and Miss

Natalie Moya gave performances of great competence, though possibly something a little more heartrending and febrile was wanted. Mr. Christopher Oldham's boyish uncouthness was exactly right, and the excrescent humours of Messrs. Michael Sherbrooke and Craighall Sherrry could not have been better.

July 11.

"The Passion Flower"

A Play by JACINTO BENAVENTE

EVERYMAN THEATRE

IN the Continental theatre Jacinto Benavente is the name which ranks next to that of Bernard Shaw, and it is in the natural order of things that the work of this great dramatist should be entirely unknown to the British stage. The new management at the Everyman Theatre has done something to repair this neglect. *The Passion Flower* is at least a beginning.

The scene of *La Malquerida* is laid among prosperous farmers in Castile. Raimunda, who is married to Esteban, has a daughter, Acacia, by a former marriage. This daughter is betrothed to a local youth, one Faustino, the son of a neighbouring farmer, Eusebio. The girl has been engaged to her cousin Norberto, but for some reason or other the match has been broken off. In this first act the course of the action is subtly foreshadowed. You are made conscious that a state of peculiar and almost abnormal hatred exists between Acacia and Esteban. At the same time you

learn that the step-father has been giving his daughter presents for many years. The close hot Spanish night is drawing in when suddenly a shot is heard, and it presently appears that Acacia's fiancé has been shot dead. Many say that the murderer is Norberto.

The second act is devoted ostensibly to the blood-feud which is now declared by Eusebio, the father of Faustino, against Norberto. Norberto is acquitted by the police, yet Faustino's brothers, convinced that he is guilty, are determined to carry out their own vendetta. They ambush him as he is on his way to see Raimunda, and he is carried into her house wounded. It is from the lips of Norberto that Raimunda, who is really the principal character in the piece, hears that which something within her bids her fear, and which we in the audience have guessed. The dreadful fact is that the shot was fired by Esteban's servant at his instigation. It has been suggested that Benavente employs here the method used by Æschylus in the *Agamemnon*, that is to say, that he has enveloped the action in deep mystery, and then allowed the evil to appear little by little in all its hideousness. For now it comes definitely to the mind of Raimunda that her husband loves her daughter. Here her emotion is two-fold. First, being a religious woman, she desires that Esteban shall know that depth of suffering which is the atonement for sin. Yet she still loves him, and will soften the measure of his punishment. When Esteban approaches her after a wild, futile flight through the woods, she has this fine passage in which the scales are evenly held

between the desire for punishment and the urge to compassion.

> Don't weep and hide your face ; ye'll have to hold it high as I do when they come to question us all. Even though the house be afire let no smoke show. Dry those eyes, blood should have dripped from them ! Drink a little water—poison it should have been ! Don't drink so fast for you're all of a sweat ! Look at the state of you, all torn by brambles, knives they should have been. Let me give you a wash : 'twould make a saint afeared to see ye.

And now Raimunda determines to do what she can to repair the mess. The truth is not going to come out, for the manservant who really fired the shot is prepared to go to jail for ten or fifteen years if necessary, with the intention of sucking the life-blood out of Esteban for ever after. Raimunda will send Acacia away to a convent and afterwards possibly marry her. But Acacia will not go. It is here that a second and even more hideous realisation flashes across Raimunda's mind—the realisation that her daughter is in love with Esteban. She tries to forestall this by the only possible means, that of throwing the girl into Esteban's arms to give a daughter's and receive a father's kiss. But the embrace is too close and the pair remain locked together. Whereupon Raimunda cries "Murder" at the top of her voice and calls for neighbours and police. So Esteban empties his gun into her.

It has been suggested by the same critic that Rai-

munda embodies the idea of the only atonement which can appease the angry gods—sacrifice of a pure victim. If that is so, one can only suggest that the Greeks were sometimes a little long-winded and tedious. Now and again the image of Mrs. Gummidge would come between us and Raimunda. And then again Spain, after all, is a long way off, and what they might do out there hardly seemed to matter very much. This attitude is not fair to Benavente, perhaps, and I have no doubt the piece would have been a great deal more effective if it had been translated into the English Midlands with the Castilian religious fervour turned into Calvinistic stubbornness. One wonders, too, whether the psychologists are right, and whether people can pretend to hate each other when all the time they are in love. To me it seems a great deal more probable that they should go on pretending to love each other when all the time they hate. But perhaps that's another story.

The piece was reasonably well played. Miss Louise Hampton had Raimunda well in hand, though the character could not easily be made sympathetic. Mr. Leslie Banks tried hard to be as craven as the feminist in Benavente insists that Esteban must be. The complexes of Miss Diana Hamilton's Acacia seemed to resolve themselves into a kind of pertness, and a pertness moreover of young ladies in glove departments. This Acacia said " There's no knowing who I mightn't be killing next " with all the accent of Kensington High Street shortly after six, and as though killing were mere face slapping. The best performance in the piece was

Miss Joan Pereira's Juliana—that is, if Juliana was the old servant. Nobody else seemed to have been within a thousand miles of Spain.

March 14.

"From Morn to Midnight"

A Play by GEORG KAISER

Translated by ASHLEY DUKES

Regent Theatre

YOU might say simply of this play that it is a yelp from the under-dog. But its translator will not let us off so lightly. He tells us that it is an example of an art whose gestures are "a vigorous clenching of the smooth palm of actuality." By my troth, Mr. Translator, these are bitter words, we murmur after Mistress Quickly. The hero "sets his question mark against the world asking whether this or that is real," which sets us asking in our turn whether the play's title should not be *Pirandello's Ghost*. Rest, rest, perturbed spirit! We thought we had laid you long ago; and anyhow it is annoying to find that you will not "stay put."

But I quite see Mr. Dukes's difficulty. Confronted with and delighted by a highly significant form of presentation, he is not content unless he can find high significance in the thing presented. There can

be no doubt as to the value in the theatre of the expressionist method. When in the old days you glanced down at your theatre programme and saw the words " Bathroom in the Palace of the Emperor Hadrian," you fell at once to wondering two things—first, what cranes had been used to haul those giant and marble blocks so noiselessly into place, and second, why the programme should fib, since you were obviously enjoying an expensive set in the beautiful London theatre of the Emperor Beerbohm. But when they tell you at the Regent that the scene is the " Interior of a Small Bank " you quite perfectly believe it. The actors, sharply defined against the vague background—in which there are neither walls nor doors—can these be characters in a bank ? Yes, because there is a square yard or so of tortured grating to suggest the cramped lives of those who must spend their lives raking in and paying out other people's money. Can cavernous gloom with a few dimly flying flags and four excited gentlemen in evening dress waving top-hats suggest a " Velodrome during Cycle Races ? " Again, yes ; because the top-hats are semaphores keeping us in touch with the crowd on the stands and signalling messages of cupidity and greed. All expressionist scenery has this two-fold appeal ; it stimulates the eye by the little which it puts in, and the mind through all that it leaves out.

Now what of the drama so vividly presented ? Is *From Morn to Midnight* a tone poem of modern unrest ? Yes, but we are to remember also that it is a vision of

society seen through the eyes of an absconding cashier who, in his "search for reality" is at the same time "questioner and interpreter." Now what are the facts, as prosaic coroner or magistrate might say, since even expressionist drama must use events for its bricks and mortar? The cashier goes off with 60,000 crowns for love of a lady who, being virtuous, declines to go off with him. Therefore the fellow has quite a lot of money to burn before midnight, when the police may reasonably be expected to get him. He begins by apostrophising in a snow field Life, Death, and a pair of dirty cuffs, using a great many words to say what I submit, in the smallest possible whisper, is just nothing at all. Now he goes home, where he is revolted by the wife who cooks endless chops, one daughter who endlessly darns, and another who ceaselessly strums upon the piano. His old mother dies, and the callous-scrupulous fellow abandons his whole family, leaving behind his honest savings, which, one reflects, will barely pay for the funeral. He next proceeds to the Velodrome, where he offers fantastic prizes, thus proving that he can purchase not the decent wretches who race, but the pig-eye'd, bull-neck'd backers and layers.

After this comes a scene in a cabaret, where money is shown to procure for his delight ladies who are tipsy, hideous, or possessed of wooden legs. And last our cashier hies him to a Salvation Army hall, where, after making some play with the stool of Repentance, he shoots himself, and so baulks the police. Now, frankly,

is there more here than a pot-house tale? Is the story, in spite of its pot-house origin, natural? Is what a great poet has called the "true pathos and sublime" of human life a pure illusion? Are our Cup-tie crowds, which we may suppose to correspond to those of the Velodrome, howling mobs of insensate beasts? Can money be put to no uses save the base and ignoble?

I suggest that more is claimed for these facts than a tale of vulgar debauch for the reason that the expressionist medium must tell more or be wasted. What this medium does, it does so very well. The peculiar virtue of expressionism is that it goes one better in the way of presenting things to the mind than the representational method which presents them to the eye. Compare the Velodrome scene with any of the old racing melodramas of Drury Lane, and you realise at once how much the definition is sharper in the case where nothing is seen. It is impossible to explain why three men waving silk hats with the co-ordinated rhythm of a lunatic ballet should be nearer to the truth of race meetings than a photographic representation of correct, stewardly behaviour. The fact remains that it is so. Possibly a point to be made here is that as soon as expressionism comes in at the door explanation in terms of words flies out of the window. For the thing has become abstract, like painting or music. But the fact that a dramatist should have found a magnificent way of saying something must not bluff us into the belief that the thing said is magnificent. I tried with might and main to see spiritual significance in Mr.

Kaiser's turgid bombinations, but all I could see, or rather hear, was a small cashier talking at enormous length through a very large hat. But I take off mine to the setting, which whetted the appetite to an extraordinary degree, though, with all respect to everybody concerned, I could not find that there was much of a meal.

Mr. Claude Rains put his accustomed virtuosity at the cashier's disposal, and thus demonstrated one of the humbugging qualities of the theatre—that an actor may impress you very considerably without conveying any considerable notion as to what his part means. Whether Mr. Rains knew is his secret. There was a very large cast, among whom one would praise highly Messrs. Nat Lewis and Henry Ford, and Mesdames Betty Potter, Caroline Keith, Colette O'Neil, and Irene Barnett.

March 14.

"Liliom"

A Legend by FERENCZ MOLNAR

Translated by OSMOND SHILLINGFORD and ANTHONY ELLIS

Duke of York's Theatre

ACTORS, like everybody else, cannot have matters both ways. They cannot expect to play parts for which their personalities fit them like gloves and then suddenly achieve success in something which is the direct opposite of their personalities. Or if they are going to do that they must begin to act, which is the last thing a celebrity wants to do who has obtained fame on the strength of seraphic innocence and/or cherubic calves. Some little time ago Mr. Ivor Novello appeared as the youthful Benvenuto Cellini, and was fifty-fifty Florentine grace and engaging young Englishman *de nos jours*. Later he played the part of a public schoolboy, whose life proved that if you spent your youth in Quixotism and getting expelled for your chum's sake, your end could only be drink, dope, and the Thames Embankment. This part also Mr. Novello filled out very entertainingly with

beautiful profile and baby grace, being quite perfectly the spoilt darling.

Now comes a Hungarian melodrama which, begging everybody's pardon, is pure highbrow gammon. It is gammon because it persuades the highbrow, alive to Budapest as the spiritual home of writers for little theatres, to cast about for symbolical, metaphysical, or poetical interpretations which the play simply will not bear. It is the reverse of the fairy story ; the clothes exist, but no emperor is inside them. Liliom is a cut-throat with a heart of gold, an Eulenspiegel turned sentimentalist. In the beginning he is "barker," fancy man, and *gigolo* to a lusty circus proprietress, whom he deserts for a maid-servant. He beats the girl, but upon hearing that she is to have a baby, cries the news to the housetops. Next he arranges to murder a cashier, but, awaiting his victim, babbles of sparrows and telegraph wires. There's not the smallest telegraph pole but in its sentinelship like an angel sings. So, he reflects, is it with the music of cut-throats' lives. Awaiting their victim Liliom and his accomplice fall to gaming, at which Liliom loses his share of the presently accruing spoil. Query : Would not Liliom at once withdraw from the business ? Why commit a profitless murder ? However, the attempt is made and fails. Liliom commits suicide, and is projected into a celestial police court, the architecture of which is copied from the Early Lavatory style of the National Liberal Club, where the Celestial beak sentences him to sixteen years' imprisonment with one day on earth in

which to do a kindness to his child. Returned to earth he strikes his daughter without hurting her, which the mother declares to be a common phenomenon, since to be struck by the beloved is not displeasing. And we reflect that we are in Hungary, and that Leopold von Sacher-Masoch was a Hungarian novelist. Finally, it all turns out to be a nightmare.

Surely it should be obvious to everybody that this hulking brute must be a brute who hulks, and that to present him with the aquiline grace and Latin effrontery of Mr. Novello at his most polished is to court disaster. As a blustering, throat-slitting bully this charming actor failed charmingly ; as Mr. Bernard Shaw's Louis Dubedat he was delightful. The only possible view of this character is that hidden somewhere in thew and muscle is a spark of something men cal soul. The fellow should be totally unable to explain himself, whereas Mr. Novello, one felt, could have explained anything and everything from Lord Beaverbrook's politics to the esoteric mystery of the Black Bottom. The character should have the maximum of physical ill-grace and clumsiness, with just a spark of something taking fire at the beauty of good sparrows, good women, and good telegraph wires. Mr. Novello gave us the exact opposite. His body was a river of grace, his thighs were cascades of loveliness, and his soul shone with a glow like that of a fountain lit up by coloured electric lights. Liliom was presented as a public-school Adonis with fastidious intonation, careful aspirates, and a sixth-form use of " whom " in con-

junction with prepositions. In a word, Mr. Novello was altogether too "dossy." His sweetheart, who should have been a sister to Miss Dorice Fordred's little slavey in *Riverside Nights*, was prettified by Miss Fay Compton into the drawing-room ornament we know so well, a conventional figure of innocence made up of one of Bellini's Madonnas, most of Ophelia, all of Mary Rose, and a dash of Mr. Milne's sophisticated chits. I do not refuse perfection to these impersonations of Miss Compton, but I do deny that a picture-gallery in Venice, the Court of Elsinore, Mr. Milne's drawing-rooms, and the kitchen in a Hungarian lodging-house are one and the same place. I suggest that what was wanted for the woman was not the percipient, lady-like parlourmaid wearing a halo instead of a cap, but an untutored servant wench, clumsy of manner and gait, with large, coarse hands and probably slightly bowed legs.

> "Beefy face an' grubby 'and—
> Law! wot do they understand?"

wrote Mr. Kipling. Miss Compton, asked by the police-inspector to show her hands for the purpose of proving that she really was a housemaid, produced a pair of ineffabilities, pink-tipped like the lotus buds of Shalimar, and crooned her references with all the saccharine sophistication of the Cromwell Road. All of which was exceedingly nice, and very good Compton, and brought this lady's admirers, among the more ardent of whom I count myself, to the seventy-seventh heaven

of bliss. But I also like Molnar, or at least want to like him. And to introduce into his *naïve*, earth-bound fairy story a modish wistfulness is to do this author the greatest possible violence.

It may be that it would not be possible to cast this play with English actors. I could cast the woman's part quite easily in America, and should choose two actresses, both of whom would be entirely different and entirely right. The first would be Miss Jo Wallace, who played the stupid housemaid in *Is Zat So?* with so much brilliance and understanding. The second would be Miss Sara Haden, who acted here in *Sun Up*. But in each case I should insist on producing the play myself. That is to say, I should still hand over the main business of production to Mr. Komisarjevsky, and confine myself to warning the actress every evening, and five minutes before she took the stage, that if she went one-thousandth part of an inch towards favour and prettiness I would, speaking Shakespeareanly, " chop her into messes." As to Mr. Novello's part, I should probably have greater difficulty. Doubtless the actor for it lives, and lives also in America. I imagine him riding in cow-punching costume on a roaring broncho down some wild and woolly cañon, entering a tea-shop, depositing a revolver on the counter, and demanding a bottle of Johnnie Bootlegger.

December 26.

"Mozart"

A Comedy by SACHA GUITRY

Gaiety Theatre

NOT the composer of music "all breathing human passion far above," and presiding spirit of the most lenitive art the world has ever known. Not the supreme melodist whose quality of spiritual detachment was summed up by Amiel in the single word "disinterestedness." Neither the despised protégé of the Archbishop of Salzburg, nor an Emperor's employé passing rich on eighty pounds a year. Neither the husband of commonplace Constance Weber, the dapper little courtier, fond of punch and billiards and proud of his hair, nor the man of genius hurried into a pauper's grave with his five so-called friends scuttling away from the cemetery in the rain. M. Guitry has cared to write about none of these things, which can all be proved. Nor yet for him the chromo-lithograph, historical drama's illustrated supplement, in which a Chopin drowses over the keyboard to the nocturnal dancing of nineteen strapping wenches, or a Beethoven, face-scratched by a valet and soul-slapped by a nephew, crashes out a vengeance in the walloping opening chords of Opus something-or-other.

M. Guitry has chosen his hero's twentieth year, and to embellish that year with incidents which, as he charmingly put it on the first night, cannot be disproved. The time is 1775, the place Paris (actually Mozart did not revisit France till 1778, but no matter). The curtain rises on the drawing-room of Madame d'Epinay, surely one of the most skilfully devised " sets " ever seen on the stage. On the spectator's left are folding doors which, being opened, reveal an antechamber where minor personages not concerned in the immediate traffic of the play may yet continue their elegant existence. At the back a flight of low stairs leads to a raised landing, ostensibly the hall of the mansion, actually the pedestal from which the little god is to descend into the common heart.

At the beginning the piece moves slowly, and we are grateful since the eye is thereby given leisure to renew acquaintance with a delicious epoch. Those engravings, each with its coquetry of blue ribbon, can only be after the little painters of the *grand siècle*, the spinet must have tinkled its accompaniment to Orfeo's *Che faro*, the very furniture prates of great ladies lancing discreet œillades and *petites marquises* making fluttering confession behind their fans. Two such fair vessels are here becalmed on the tender sea. That well-found frigate, Madame d'Epinay, has hoisted full sail to catch the Baron Grimm's ardour, which no longer blows in her direction ; that fast cutter which is her god-daughter discusses a convenient match. Her gallant chatters about passion, fidelity and the like, idly

enough to give you time to reflect what your thoughts had been on seeing your first Molière play, or on turning the first page of Choderlos De Laclos's *Les Liaisons Dangereuses*.

The Baron Grimm brings you back to decorum with some observations as to the value of criticism and the worth to his century of Jean Jacques Rousseau. He takes up a manuscript which is lying on the spinet and handles it with all the reverence which the French use towards genius and wit. What is this manuscript? Why, what else could it be but Beaumarchais's *The Barber of Seville*, which—oh, cunning Sacha!—we remember to have been produced in the very year which the characters are now living. Perhaps we recollect also that this work was as much a disastrous failure at its first performance as Gluck's *Alceste*. Then, bethinking ourselves of Rousseau's "Certainly this opera fell, but it fell from the skies!" we attain realisation that M. Guitry, half by virtue of his own quality of *marivaudage*, and still more by the leave he has given us to think for ourselves, has reconstituted the world when it was most polite.

And perhaps it was time, at least for those who are impatient of the cackle which dates the action of a play, and long for the prancing and curveting of the 'osses. Every theatre-goer has experienced moments of emotion, for the justification of which he must search his intelligence in vain. Duse gave him many such, and I remember one of the sort in Bernhardt's scene of tender banter in the church in *La Tosca*, and one

when Armand asked how long before the flower must fade, and Marguerite replied : " Mais ce qu'il faut à toute fleur pour se faner, l'espace d'un soir ou d'un matin." It is not exaggerating to say that on Monday evening people were observed to cry, and by that I mean shed tears, when Music's heavenly child appeared at the top of the stairs and came down them to kneel at Mme. d'Epinay's feet. Those who like to resolve a theatrical emotion into its component parts may find here something of the stirring of the sensibilities always occasioned by radiant happiness in conjunction with youth, something of their own unceasing wonder at that genius whose pure loveliness in achievement has never been surpassed, something of that sympathy which a certain quality of magnetism in certain players can evoke before a word has been uttered, something of recognition that the piece which M. Guitry has written to Mlle. Printemps should be so obviously an act of adoration. At the moment of her entrance this exquisite artist made conquest of the house, and subsequently held it in thrall until the final curtain.

As a piece of play-making the piece is of the slightest. Mozart blushes, stammers, and must have recourse to the spinet to express in song the gratitude he cannot utter in speech. The idiom which he uses is not his, but M. Reynaldo Hahn's, and later by a century and a half. And confidently we ask ourselves what are two worlds worth if the playgoer is not to make the best of both of them. The act-drop falls on the boy's resolve to set the story of Don Juan to music. In the second

act we have the unspoken plea that no man can write a grand opera of the passions without having made the grand tour of the sentiments. Will Mme. d'Epinay be Mozart's guide? She will, and readily. Willing mentors are also found in the marriageable young lady, a serving maid, and a dancer. The second act closes on the reading of a letter from Mozart's homely fiancée. This little scene, which is the best in the play, also gives us the best of M. Hahn's music, and proves once more the French genius for idealising the *facteur*. The postman is the most sensitive personage in French opera, so much so that in his presence even a Massenet can desist from nauseating and content himself with being merely cloying. Our visitors are great artists in this, that having provided a good thing they take care not to give too much of it. In both acts the curtain came down ten minutes too soon—in other words, it fell at exactly the right moment. The third act did not quite come up to the level of the others. In it M. Guitry dissented from the Tennysonian view as to the propriety of loving one woman only, cleaving to her, and worshipping her through years of operatic scores. At the end Mozart drew up his mistresses in revue order, and bade farewell to the assembled troop with a particular inflection which each of the fair might take to herself.

It would be impossible to praise too highly the perfection and finesse of Mlle. Printemps's acting as the young Mozart. She does not entirely divest herself of her own personal charm, but she sees and presents all the wayward pathos of immature genius, and her

manner is reasonably boyish. She sings, if one may say so, quite as well as need be, and spares us the airs and graces of the *prima donna*. There is none of that operatic nonsense which breaks a mood, launches into some formidable aria, and then resumes existence where the singer left off. Mlle. Printemps uses song and speech indifferently, changing almost imperceptibly from one to the other. But the most significant thing about the performance is the way in which we are made to feel that we are in the presence of genius. It is credible that behind the pretty boy who walks Mme. d'Epinay's boudoir in adolescent trepidation, behind the inessential Mozart there should be the happy jeweller of pure sound. Credit should always be given to the artist for having implied that which we infer, and exquisite, therefore, must be the artist who to her remorseless little realists of drawing-room and gutter can add the spirit of the composer speaking through the mouth of his own Cherubino. M. Guitry plays the Baron with verve and brilliance whenever Mlle. Printemps's occasional absences from the scene call for such display. At other times he stands apart, rapt like one who has accomplished a marvel. And we in the audience perfectly understand the reason for that rapture.

June 27.

"The Years Between"

A Play by JEAN-JACQUES BERNARD

Everyman Theatre

"The Sulky Fire"

A Play by JEAN-JACQUES BERNARD

R.A.D.A. Players

LET me state quite simply that *The Years Between* is one of the best plays performed in London for a very long time. The author has something to say, and says it with extraordinary delicacy, point, and finish. Or you might put it that he is content to supply clues and leave the mind to conduct its own investigation.

M. Jean-Jacques Bernard, the immensely serious son of one of the most frolicsome French writers, has taken as his motive the love of mother and daughter for the same man. This theme is the basis of that novel which many people consider to be Maupassant's finest. Only, in *Fort comme la Mort* the man fell in love with the daughter after he had been the mother's lover. In *Le Printemps des Autres* there is no guilty relation-

ship. The husband never knows the older woman's secret, and the daughter learns it only a few moments before the curtain falls. We, in the audience, do not know exactly at what point the mother herself becomes conscious of her impolitic, unlawful, but not unnatural passion. One understands that throughout at least two of the three acts the author desires the actress who is playing Clarisse to convey the idea of imperfect realisation. She is to be tormented by she knows not what, to respond to incitements without knowing that they exist, to feel pangs without realising that they are those of jealousy, to endure remorse without committal of sin.

I am not quite sure that in insisting upon this M. Bernard has not made the converse mistake to that of the other playwright who put in his stage directions : " Enter Jane, having drunk three cups of tea." No actress can convey what in the nature of things the audience cannot possibly guess. But we know that Clarisse is in love with Maurice, and it is Clarisse who tells us. Everything that she says and does is unmistakable, and must point to this. Now, M. Bernard demands that Clarisse should be presented like a signpost which should know nothing of the directions written on it. I suggest that the more frantic Pirandellists should meet together to debate whether such a feat as being explicit, yet unaware, can be within the competence of any player however skilful. Can the character impersonated remain unconscious of those cups of tea when she has to tell us all about them through

the mouth of the impersonating actress? Let the Pirandellists decide. Frankly, my own view is that this is to demand too much from the art of the player, and to mistake the acted scene for the novelist's page. Fortunately, the piece loses nothing even if Clarisse knows all about her passion. That was my view of her, whatever the author's intentions, and whichever of us is right I still hold that this is one of the very best plays I have seen for a long time. It is a small masterpiece.

Technically, M. Bernard's piece is superb. There is no plot in the ordinary sense, the spectators being concerned with extraordinarily delicate adjustments of relationships. Half-formed sentences reveal half-formed thoughts, impulses, motives, and you know that this is life as people really live it. No high and tragic horse is ridden, and though momentous issues are being decided, the quarrel is ostensibly about a cook or whether the young couple shall spend their holiday with Clarisse or by themselves. This is not a piece for the vulgar, who will see nothing in it, but for the connoisseur in craftsmanship. Miss Beatrice Wilson's acting in this play is the finest thing to be seen in London at the present time. She cannot give that unconsciousness which her author bids her because nobody could. But in respect of every other intellectual subtlety her acting is in a class by itself. Miss Beatrix Thomson and Mr. Lawrence Anderson play with a corresponding brilliance of understanding and certainty of execution.

June 20.

"The Years Between" and "The Sulky Fire"

PROBABLY it was a disservice to M. Jean-Jacques Bernard to produce this early play immediately on top of his later and very much better work at the Everyman Theatre. *The Sulky Fire* is not, one suggests, a very good translation of the French *Le Feu Qui Reprend Mal.* A sulky fire is surely one which has never exhibited any inclination towards kindling, whereas the fire in this piece is supposed to have burnt brightly at the beginning, to have gone out through no fault of its own, and to have found difficulty in recovering its former heat. Better, one suggests, to have borrowed from *Othello* and called the piece *The Light Relumed.* This is the story. When André Merin went into the trenches, the mayor billeted on André's wife a single American officer. Blanche fell in love with him, but remained "correct." Then the Armistice came, the officer went away, the husband returned, and Blanche, who loved him quite as well as the American, only differently, tidied up the domestic hearth and prepared to relight the fire. All this early part of the piece was extremely well done. The theory that a virtuous woman in addition to resisting temptation must not know temptation when she meets it, thus achieving victory without any cost to herself—this theory of feminine virtue dies hard on the sentimental stage. But M. Bernard had thoroughly aroused interest in, and sympathy for, a good woman who had won through to faithfulness at considerable expense of the sensibilities.

Then Blanche did what all wives must do who are married to insanely jealous husbands—she denied both victory and cost, and pretended there had never been any battle. Unfortunately, Blanche had a friend. Jeanne was the most respected married woman in the village, but it was Jeanne's name which had been murmured by one of André's comrades in his last agony. André is immensely disquieted by this. If Jeanne can lie, why should not Blanche lie also? For two hours the remorseless interrogatory went on, and frankly we got a little tired of it.

So tired, in fact, that we relieved the tedium by inventing Blanche's answers for her. Why didn't Blanche blurt out the truthful "I wanted to be unfaithful, dear, but I *wasn't*"? And in the event of this failing, as of course it would have failed, why didn't she propose the alternative "I didn't *want* to be unfaithful, old thing, but I was"? But neither the absolute yea or nay, nor any half-way state would have satisfied André. All he knew was that he would never know! The piece had a sentimental ending of the last fatuity. Blanche was preparing to go to America when André's father came in and said that he was eighty and lonely. Whereupon Blanche, being unable to think of André in either situation, fell into his arms, and André pretended to believe her for reasons infinitely less valid than any she had hitherto adduced. And we knew that the quarrel would start all over again immediately after supper, or probably half-way through.

The trouble about this piece is the extreme illiberality

of its point of view. Let me invite all French playwrights to read again Diderot's *Supplément au Voyage de Bougainville* and consider again that witty philosopher's views " on the inexpediency of attaching moral ideas to certain physical actions which have nothing to do with them." The lesson to be learnt from M. Bernard's play is not that chastity is a virtue, but that Blanche's reward for exercising that virtue is so scant as to discourage all wives similarly circumstanced. One would invite serious French dramatists to consider afresh " a precept which forbids the change which is in all nature ; which orders a constancy which cannot be found in it, and which violates the liberty of the male and of the female by tying them to one another for ever ; a fidelity confining the most capricious of pleasures to one and the same individual ; a vow of immutability between two creatures of flesh and blood, under a sky which is never for two minutes the same, in grottos which threaten ruin, at the base of crumbling rocks, beneath falling trees, on the unstable stones."

The essence of M. Bernard's piece is the distress which goes on in the mind of a mean and pettifogging schoolmaster who cannot decide whether his wife is or is not telling tarradiddles. This makes for a dull play, just as *Othello* would be a dull play if you were to shear the words of their poetry, deprive the Moor of his splendour, and turn him into a jazz-drummer of splenetic temper. We, in this country, have heard all that M. Bernard has to tell us about jealousy since we could

first read poetry, and a thousand times better put. And in any case, his schoolmaster is worrying about something which either never happened or is all over and done with. What we really wanted him to tackle was the situation arising if Blanche had had something to confess, and if she had met him with confession. There would have been room for new thought here, the question of believing or disbelieving a wife who may or may not be telling the truth having long been worn to rags.

It is quite possible, of course, that this sort of play appeals more to our neighbours than it does to us. It is possible that in France love and passion occupy a larger share of the attention than they do in this country. I cannot imagine any Englishman who has intellectual hobbies, or even goes in for golf, being solely absorbed by the passion of jealousy to the obliteration of every other interest, nor can I imagine any woman allowing herself to be manhandled and treated as if she were a favourite iron which some other golfer has pinched out of her husband's bag.

Miss Una Venning managed to create a good deal of sympathy for Blanche, though how she made the character keep her temper with her idiotic husband I have no notion. One imagines that Mr. Austin Trevor played the impolite lunatic exactly as his author would have had him played. That is to say, he made us all sympathise enormously with the American. Was it this actor who played the unendurable Frenchman in *Fallen Angels?* One certainly remembers that he was cast for Alec d'Urberville. And now comes the

egregious André. It is possible that in disliking these three characters to the maximum point of dislike one is unconsciously paying a tribute to the actor. It is improbable, I suggest, that anybody could be quite so boring as Mr. Andrew Churchman's Old Mérin, who spoke every word with the deliberation of one cutting an epitaph in stone.

June 27.

"Israel"

A Play by HENRI BERNSTEIN

Strand Theatre

SOME time ago I was horrified to see a sandwich man bearing aloft a placard on which was written "Millions of Chinamen have never heard of John the Baptist. Is it nothing to you?" I wondered what one's feelings would be if, walking through the streets of Peking, one saw a Chinaman parading a notice: "Millions of Englishmen have never heard of Confucius. Is it nothing to you?" Last week in connection with M. Bernstein's play, I read several allusions to "the Jewish problem in France," and straightway fell to wondering how, if one were living in Constantinople or Tokio or Timbuctoo, one would relish articles about "The Christian Problem." Really, when you come to think of it, the local majority's way of wondering what to do about the local minority is a colossal impertinence. People are either charming or tedious. Buddhist and Mohammedan, Jew and Christian—why not like in each such qualities as are likeable and ignore the rest? One understands, however, that the tolerant attitude is not universal, and that racial and

religious prejudice is not unknown in Russia, Poland, the Southern States of America, Armenia, Ireland, Liverpool, and Soho. But that anything so silly could exist in Paris, that city of vaunted enlightenment, seems to me incredible. Yet so it is, and this play proves it. The French may know all about *savoir faire* and *savoir vivre*, but so plain a maxim as " Live and let live " is apparently beyond them.

Let it be confessed that the first act of *Israel* induced considerable shame. Seven individuals, among whom could be enumerated a Prince, a Marquis, and three Counts, met at their club to demand of an elderly Jew that he should resign his thirty years' membership. In the event of Justin Gutlieb refusing, he was to be shot dead by that noted duellist, the Prince de Clar. The old gentleman very properly refused, and promptly had his hat knocked off, which insult he apparently swallowed. Whereupon the Prince adjourned to receive the congratulations of his friends, send for the newspaper reporters, ring up the clerical party, and, presumably, telegraph the Pope. Was not this matter for shame ? But the interval intervening, one had time to reflect that such behaviour is nowhere enjoined by the religion of which the Prince was so poor a professor, and that possibly the person to be ashamed of was M. Bernstein, perverse enough to be still harping on the old Jew-baiting string. But all the time at the back of one's mind was the recollection that this play was written eighteen years ago, and something more than the suspicion that its first act was based upon an inci-

dent which had actually occurred. After all, the Dreyfus affair was fact and not fiction. That being so, there was nothing for it except to absolve M. Bernstein and reflect that of all interpretations of the theme of "love one another," the French version is certainly the rummiest.

This way of thinking was reinforced during the further progress of the play. For the Prince, discovering that the elderly Jew was his father, decided to be christened all over again, knowing like Algernon in a wittier play that his constitution could stand it, and to become a monk whether his health and temperament could stand it or not. Whereupon his father took a hand in the debate, declaring that he wasn't going to have a perfectly good Jew thrown away upon what, like Mr. Mantalini, he declared to be "a dem'd, damp, moist, unpleasant monastery." So the Prince, in full possession of health and vigour, rank and wealth, went into his study and shot himself, to the confusion of the clerical party and the glorification of Judaism. Or so one gathered from the streaming eyes round about one. Personally I was content to rub mine, these events connoting a world which I neither know nor want to know. The merits of any play, however, being supposed to have nothing to do with the merits of its subject-matter, the only point I am to decide is whether *Israel* is a good piece of theatre. I would answer, yes and no. The first act is appallingly dull, and from the point of view of craftsmanship quite incompetent. Nothing happens except the removal of the old gentleman's top-

hat, which a self-respecting playwright would have knocked off within two minutes of the rise of the curtain. The second act, in which the mother's confession is wrung from her, is moderately exciting Sardoucum-Henry Arthur Jones, only not so good as either. The last act is interesting in the way that a public debate between a vegetarian and a cannibal might prove interesting. Both sides talk a language which I, personally, am unable to distinguish from pure gibberish.

Miss Thorndike, who could play half a dozen equivocating Duchesses like the Prince's mother before breakfast, was in first-class trim, coming up fit as a daisy for one emotional round after another. Mr. Alexander Onslow, who was in the other corner, put up a capital fight, leading finely with his left and doing well in the clinches. The bout went the full distance, Miss Thorndike winning on points. But one kept saying to oneself that the loser was the kind of noble creature that M. Bernstein's snobbish *exalté* very exactly was not. You could imagine the fellow qualifying to meet Dempsey, or, in the English case, putting in good work at Lord's in preparation for the Test Matches. But that he should indulge in such hysterical nonsense as anti-Semitism—go to ! It says a good deal for Mr. Onslow's performance that we did not realise till we got home that M. Bernstein's Prince was the most inveterate bounder and shocking cad that ever trod even the French stage. Mr. George Bealby, as impressive as Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob rolled into one, achieved

patriarchal dignity, principally by standing stock still and relating the history of his life with top-hat and stick retained in his gloved hand in the good old French idiotic way. In the third act he put up a fine fight, though in the stress of battle the number of killed and wounded among his aspirates was considerable.

Now is it too much to ask of Fortune and the Jewish Drama League that this play shall not be inflicted upon us again? It has no distinction, and in this country is so much preaching to the converted.

April 18.

"The Snow Man"

A Play by LOUIS VERNUEIL and C. K. ELLIS

Savoy Theatre

WOULD Mr. Kinsey Peile wear a top-hat? That was the question which pre-occupied one. Mr. Peile's place in order of appearance was last but two, and he was to play the Baron de Lisle, the one person belonging to the world of the naughty young man at whose regeneration through the medium of the naughty young woman we are assisting. Last but one was Maurice's mother, Madame du Parc, and last of all was Mademoiselle Lucienne de la Tour, the charming young lady to whom the French theatre ordains that Maurice shall always be married. It is in this order that the same personages, *mutatis mutandis*, are introduced in Dumas's well-worn classic. Who that has ever seen *La Dame aux Camélias* can ever forget the silk hat perched upon the brow of M. Duval *père*, that symbol of domestic virtue which is less a head-covering than a proclamation? *Le chapeau, c'est l'homme.*

Who does not remember the exact point in his

reproachful discourse at which this heaviest of fathers decides to uncover ? Marguerite has put into his hands the deed whereby she proves that it is she and not Armand who is paying the expenses of that country villa. We remember how, after the apology, the request is preferred that Armand shall abandon Marguerite to the end that his charming sister may marry into a good family, how Marguerite consents first to a temporary separation and then to a life-long one, and how she realises that only discovery in the arms of a former lover can kill Armand's infatuation. One's excuse for recalling all this is that M. Verneuil spends a whole evening in doing so. Maurice is Armand, with the further complications that he is thief and drug-taker. But this only ennobles Liane de Valcourt's passion for the boy. Within ten minutes we find her offering the young wastrel *bon souper, bon gîte et le reste.* " Do you mean it ? " asks Maurice. " Why not ? " replies Liane. As the curtain makes pudic descent we reflect how much more delicately the earlier playwright managed this scene.

There is some pretence in the second act that Liane has an eye to the main, as well as the amorous chance. Half a dozen bars of popular melody have convinced her that Maurice is a musical-comedy genius. Therefore she believes, or overcomes the last of Maurice's dignity by pretending to believe, that she will recoup herself later on for the sum to be laid out now. Not that Maurice has any scruples. Indeed, his attitude is exactly that of Barbey D'Aurévilley, who on being

remonstrated with on like grounds replied, "Que de bruit pour quelques côtelettes !"

Alas that Mr. Peile preferred to leave his hat in the hall ! Yet though the manners of your elderly *raisonneur* have changed, his mission remains the same. That of the Baron is to get Maurice out of the clutches of Liane and into those of Lucienne. The improper lady has gone out to haggle with an American impresario about advance royalties on Maurice's latest score, and so the coast is clear for the more proper females. After a time Lucienne and the Baron are sent shopping, leaving Maurice alone with his mother. To them enters Liane, and the true horrors of such a confrontation pierce to our marrow. The act ends with Liane sobbing on Maurice's breast and Maurice vowing glumly that he will never marry Lucienne. That the play doesn't end here is excused for two reasons—first, because in life the situation would probably not have ended so, and, second, because the French theatre has never had the least intention of leaving a situation unresolved. In the Baron de Lisle we have had the familiar marshalling of the cohorts of respectability ; it is now the turn of the spirit to be edified by those droves of abnegatory martyrs to depict whose ecstasy the French theatre singly exists. Liane, who knows that the game is up as soon as she casts eyes on Mme. du Parc, must now telephone her former lover, give Maurice ocular demonstration of her faithlessness, and indulge in all those paroxysms which attend such demonstration. The final curtain finds Maurice taxi-ing to Lucienne's arms

and Liane declaring her intention of becoming a washerwoman.

The programme proclaims this to be a new play. But in essentials it is old, old as those *strapontins* upon which in French theatres one sits, old as the vampires who blackmail you for their *petit bénéfice*. Miss Jeanne de Casalis, who is a most accomplished artist, and Mr. Tom Douglas, whose quality of suggesting injury to something fine is always moving, almost convinced one that there was life in these old bones. But not quite. I am getting anxious about Mr. Douglas. Why does he not desist from starring in the same *rôle*, though it may be differently disguised, and come down to the workaday business of acting? Youth's a stuff will not endure, and this charming young player does not seem to be acquiring other and less perishable qualities. Mr. Komisarjevsky delighted with his modish *décor* of salmon-pink walls with hangings of *sauce mousseline*. But that was only his fun. The real setting for this piece is a certain familiar boudoir which has been part of the properties of the Vaudeville Theatre, Paris, since February 2, 1852.

March 28.

"Is Zat So?"

A Comedy by JAMES GLEASON and RICHARD FABER

Apollo Theatre

THIS is the jolliest little comedy. But first one would like to say something on the subject of imported plays. Why not Free Trade in this matter? Consider it another way. No lover of wine objects to the importation of French claret. Margate is not Margaux. We have not a Château Stoke Newington, and I, for one, am grateful that we haven't. Yet we might, I suggest, look askance at French cricket-bats, which we can make for ourselves at least as well as anybody else. So it is in the theatre. One of the greatest delights in playgoing is seeing foreign artists in foreign plays. There are any amount of good American pieces which present life from the always entertaining American angle. Let us have these by all means; our stage is the richer for them. But to welcome such plays is not to acquiesce in the Americanising of our own stage. One does not aim at any particular country here. To Americanise, Teutonise, or Frenchify the English theatre must always be bad for the English

theatre. But friendly rivalry and exchange of visits are no usurpation. Let our reception of American managers and players, who temporarily rent and perform in our theatres, moult no feather of cordiality. But let us also invite them to have the courage of their nationality and give us those things which America can do superbly and we cannot do at all.

Is Zat So ? is a particularly good example of the kind of thing we should otherwise never see. Ostensibly it is all about a West Side boxer and his manager, who, being hard up, get themselves engaged as butler and footman "somewhere about 59th Street." But the spell cast upon us by this play is really the personal charm and talent of the two principal comedians. "Chick" Cowan, the glove-fighter, is what Pistol would have called a "tender lambkin." For all his brawn and muscle, he is "doux comme un mouton." Something sheepish of wit, too, since he must choose the middle of a round for the untying of a knotty problem outside the business of the moment. Hence the slumber-stuff, or whatever they call the knock-out. Mr. Armstrong makes the pug almost wistful, and gives him something not far removed from a gentle mind.

"Hap" Hurley, his manager, is a horse of another colour, needle-sharp, and a master of ironic comment. He has the moon-calf so well under thumb that the rugged fellow trembles at his weedy mentor's lightest word. "Hap" is what Ben Jonson calls a "fine pragmatic," manager, trainer, second, boss, and pal.

Mr. James Gleason, part-author of the comedy, plays him with infinite skill. He makes the fellow all mind, and his figure another of Falstaff's cheese-parings so that the head is such as you imagine carved upon a radish. Note how the hands are made to speak volumes and eke out the fumbling mind. There is an admirable moment when the trainer, encountering Cupid disguised as a stenographer, is knocked all of a heap. The boxer cannot bring his friend round, until it occurs to his slow mind to make clatter with decanter and cigarette box, which forbidden noises restore the dietist to his senses with a sharp "Cut that out!" But "Chick" has his love affair, too. Hardly a word passes between bruiser and nursemaid, and their silences are as eloquent as the suspirations of Mr. Meredith anent Richard and Lucy. Miss Jo Wallace lent some very understanding assistance here, and Mr. Armstrong's "If I live a thousand years I shan't never know why you fell for me!" had the humility of all devout lovers.

February 21.

"The Fall Guy"

A Domestic Comedy by JAMES GLEASON and GEORGE ABBOTT

Apollo Theatre

HAPPY is the country which has no history and felicitous may be those plays about which one can find little or nothing to say. The plot of *The Fall Guy* is tenuity itself. The theme of the innocent who takes himself for a person of extraordinary discernment —I really cannot bother about the American for this, though I think the word "sap" comes in somewhere —seems to be a favourite one with our friends. Perhaps contradiction is the genius of this country. Certainly no two things could be more contradictory than America's two exports—those egregious films showing mentality and manners hideous and horrible, and the flesh-and-blood globe-trotting Americans who are the embodiment of quaintness and charm. If there is one national characteristic of which the American film makes us aware it is cocksureness, whereas the note of every American one has ever met either in real life or on the stage is an entirely disarming modesty.

The Show-Off, by Mr. George Kelly, was a simple,

ruthless, delightful *exposé* of what we should call a " swanker." Now comes Mr. Gleason's piece, which takes the same human failing for its butt. There is not very much " to " this play. The out-of-work hero is persuaded, against the advice of his sensible, warm-hearted little wife, to indulge in a very mild form of boot-legging, only to find that he has been inveigled into trading in dope. He double-crosses his superiors, is forgiven by the police and, which is more important, by his wife, and concludes that now that he knows that he is a " sap " there is a probability that he may not behave so much like one in the future. There is nothing very remarkable here except the acting, which is full of interest, this being due possibly to our unfamiliarity with the types presented. I have very little doubt that an American audience would " fall for " a couple of Cockney roughs impersonated by, say, Mr. Leslie Banks and Mr. Reginald Bach. Everybody on Monday evening fell for the simpleton of Mr. Ernest Truex, and the two toughs admirably played by Mr. Frank McHugh and Mr. Effingham Pinto.

For the first half-hour I was, I confess, just a little disappointed with Mr. Truex in the same way that many people sometimes found that they were disappointed with Welch or Hawtrey. The actor did not seem to be doing anything that was in any way remarkable. But at the end of the half-hour you felt that you knew all about the little man. You knew that he was thoroughly decent underneath his showy manner, that his heart was sound whatever might be the matter

with his head. The study of Kippsian manners, American version, was more than entertaining. Shall I hazard that " hobo " is the correct word for the gumph who would play the saxophone ? Whatever the word, Mr. McHugh tumbled into everybody's affections with his first discordant note, and remained there until the end of the piece. As for the dope dealer of Mr. Pinto, I can only say that the actor very cleverly impersonated the type whose mother, according to Doctor Johnson, under pretence of keeping a brothel, was a receiver of stolen goods. " Nifty " Frank Herman was indeed the last word in deplorableness. Mr. S. J. Warmington had a very difficult part to play, since it consisted very largely in saying nothing. But he showed himself a master of laconism. Mr. Philip Carlton brought with him that air of extraordinary veracity which would shatter to pieces anything but a really good play. I should like to see him act in something by Mr. Galsworthy.

But probably the best performance was that given by Miss Beatrice Noyes. There appears to be growing up in America a school of young actresses to which nothing on this side quite corresponds. To the jaded theatre-goer it is an intense relief to hear the women who keep small homes going discuss, not the wild flutterings of their impossibly romantic hearts, but the things which really make for perturbation—the question, for instance, of what they will do if the bread-winner loses his job. Miss Clare Blandick was the first in this line over here, and now comes Miss Noyes,

making you forget that you are in a theatre and believe that you are in the same room with her, sharing her humble joys and sorrows. The scene in which she takes her silly husband's head in her lap and comforts him is a good bit of pathos quite perfectly accomplished.

September 26.

"They Knew What They Wanted"

A Comedy by SYDNEY HOWARD

St. Martin's Theatre

AS for the atrocious title to this American comedy —forget it, as our friends say. The piece itself is enchanting, fresh, original, and deals with a seam of life unknown on this side. This is a tale of Tempe or a dale in Arcady, refreshing, indeed, after the storyettes of Maida Vale masquerading as Mayfair. One had read one's programme with, let it be confessed, something of a sinking heart, for it foreshadowed an actress whose successive incarnations had connoted a fallen angel, a green hat, and a Scotch mist. Would this piece be yet another incredible farrago of maidens very far from loth, and epigrammatic noblemen too languid to pursue?

One's fears were soon allayed. The curtain had not been up five minutes before we knew that Miss Bankhead was to play the part of an ex-waitress in a "spaghetti-joint" or cheap restaurant. Ten minutes later the actress appeared, wearing the cheapest of cotton

frocks. At once she set about a piece of sincere emotional acting, felt from the heart, and controlled by the head, which set up a new standard of accomplishment for this clever artist. Miss Bankhead made an instantaneous and a great success, and one would seize the occasion to say that to deplore the misdirection of talent is a very different thing from denying its existence. It would be ungenerous not to recognise that her performance in this piece is one of quite unusual merit.

The story of the play is simple enough. Tony, an Italian vine-grower in California, has made a fortune out of Prohibition, and desires someone to leave it to. He has also been attracted by a girl who waited upon him one day in the city, and he sends her a letter proposing marriage. Or, rather, since he is virtually illiterate, Tony gets his farm hand, Joe, to write the letter for him. And so that the girl may not be frightened by his grey hairs the ardent, *rusé* lover encloses, not his own photograph, but Joe's, trusting to his secretary's vagabondage and the call of the road to get him out of the way before his bride's arrival. The situation has conflict enough and to spare, since there is conflict in the auditorium as well as on the stage. Given the best possible actors it must go hard with any audience to decide whether they incline to Tony's satisfaction, or to Joe's. For the case is Rostand's put the other way round; it is Christian who writes Cyrano's love-letters, and with whom obviously Roxane is to fall in love.

Both parts are beautifully acted at the St. Martin's. Tony is played by Mr. Sam Livesey, probably the best exponent on our stage of what the French call *drame*, which is all that vast stretch of country lying between melodrama and tragedy. Mr. Livesey has great powers of characterisation, and is equally at home in Tuscany, Wharfedale, or California. His Italian in this piece is as true as need be. At any rate, it is extraordinarily like the ice-cream vendors presented on another stage by Messrs. George Carney and J. W. Rickaby, and one feels sure that if Euclid had been a dramatic critic he would have laid it down that actors who aim at the same thing and are like one another must also be like that thing. Mr. Livesey's Tony *exuberates*, in Johnson's phrase ; he is your proper hogshead of vitality, a vat of sunshine and optimism, a barrel-organ full of Verdi and Tosti and Leoncavallo. If the play is to be the tragedy of some village Othello, then here, you feel, is your man, who will at least not want for temperament.

" Opposite him," in our friends' distressing phrase, was Mr. Glenn Anders, who created the part of Joe in America, and received a truly British welcome on his first appearance here. The piece must stand or fall by the likeableness of Joe. Perhaps we do not know very much about that character in this country, and may be excused for thinking that over here he would be what Mulvaney called " the top-spit av Whitechapel," and Private Ortheris dubbed a " keb-huntin', penny-toy, bootlace, baggage-tout, 'orse-'oldin' sand-

wich-backed " something or other. We have met Joe in the works of Mark Twain, Jack London, and O. Henry under the style and title of " hobo." He is child of nature, cynic and sentimentalist, full of 'cute saws and extravagantly modern instances, shiftless, lackadaisical, good-for-nothing, yet abounding in prodigies of generosity and self-sacrifice, an inveterate talker with an endless conceit of himself, yet cattle-dumb where his affections are concerned.

All hearts went out to Mr. Anders before he had been on the stage ten minutes, and one felt that Joe's love affair was going to hurt us as much as it was going to hurt Joe. Few things are more moving on the stage than the efforts which two young people, " born for each other," as novelists used to remark, make to avoid belonging to each other. How far this pair succeeded I do not propose to tell. Sufficient to say that it is a good story well told. Humble ill-hap may be more moving than well-bred lucklessness, and as we watch the wordless love-making of the ex-waitress and the hobo we may be forgiven, perhaps, for thinking again of those " darkling nightingales," Feverel and his Lucy. Only our pair are silent, soundlessly pouring into eyes and ears and hands the ever-fresh treasures of their souls. When the frightened girl wrests herself from her lover's embrace and rushes from the house with the other in hot pursuit we know that the two have " outflown philosophy."

Miss Bankhead acted throughout with great sincerity. But then the play, for once, gave her the chance

to be sincere. It was a refreshing change to find the right reasons given for improbable acts in place of the usual preposterous excuses for events as to whose probability or otherwise one cares nothing. The reason why the heroine of this play went through with her marriage was simply that she had thrown up her job in the city, couldn't get back to it, and would have been laughed at by the other girls if she had got back to it. Miss Bankhead made this abundantly clear, and presented the superficies of the character very cleverly, as well as its heart. Excellent performances were also contributed by Messrs. Wilfred Shine and James Dyrenforth.

May 23.

"The Best People"

By DAVID GRAY and AVERY HOPWOOD

Lyric Theatre

HOW brilliantly successful this farce is may be judged from the fact that sallies which a nine-year-old schoolboy would hold to be of meagre invention are quaffed by the audience as though they were authentic draughts from the Pierian spring. "Don't shock my brother-in-law," says the Heavy Father; "he has a weak heart." "It's not his heart that's weak," retorts Millie, the chorus-girl, "it's his head." Whereupon we all laugh, as though Wit were new-delivered of the antique jest. This particular *jeu d'esprit* may not appear in cold print to be among Felicity's choicer children. But the point is that cold print is not the test here. The test is whether the genius for farce of the players who take up the burden of farce has carried us into some heaven where squibs take on the quality of rockets. The answer is yes; we have been so translated.

Another attribute of farce is that it is under little compulsion to heed either character or probability. Thus we find Millie saying as she gulps her cham-

pagne, " Gee, it tastes like my foot's gone to sleep." Now since Millie is in the habit of supping with millionaries and must be familiar with the taste of champagne this is not a remark which she could possibly make, unless, of course, she has found that it " goes " and produces more " bubbly." Millie is interesting, not as a chorus-girl, but as an example of what writers for the American popular theatre want its audiences to think about these young women. Millie is a good girl with a heart of gold, who wears simple frocks and goes home after the show to an invalid mother. Agreed. Or Millie is a less good girl whose way of life is no bar to the heart of gold and the invalid mother. Again agreed. But the Millie who combines the ailing progenitor, the generous heart-beats, dazzling frocks, jewellery from the Rue de la Paix, *and* perfect virtue—this combination suggests muddled thinking. This character illustrates very exactly the difference between the American film and the American theatre. A vamp on the film may be presented like Doll Tearsheet. In the playhouse though she may talk like Doll she must be supposed in behaviour to be as circumspect as Isabella and as " nice " as Hero.

Our authors suffer too greatly from what the medical faculty terms pseudoblepsis or false vision. Consider Marion, the rude, obnoxious daughter of luxury, who has apparently drunk at Rousseau's well of mingled vice and sentimentalism, and thinks to lose both poisons in the antiseptic bosom of her father's manly, six-foot, Canadian chauffeur. Marion will give

up smoking cigarettes—the symbols of viciousness—if the chauffeur will marry her to-morrow ; the chauffeur bargains for a probationary period of six weedless months. They haggle interminably, and we are reminded of the bridge-playing husband who stood out against taking his wife to a dance. " What happened ? " asked a friend. " We compromised," replied the husband, " I took her." Of course Marion, once married, will smoke as soon as she wants—probably at the wedding breakfast. Consider again Bertie, the twenty-year-old dipsomaniac who is put into a cab by the cabaret's night-porter and to bed by his father's butler. Is he to be redeemed by marrying Alice, the little chorus-bud about to bloom under the protection of Millie's full-blown rose ? Alice will marry the wastrel if he will give up the drink, whereas the young man wants the wedding first and the reformation afterwards. If Bertie has his way, when do we think it probable that he will next get drunk ? Why, before the honeymoon is over. Is there any kind of truth or credibility in all that the Heavy Father has to say about redemption of upper-class sons and daughters by marriage with droves of barmaids and herds of bus-conductors ? No. He doesn't believe a word of it, and neither do we. One happy marriage alone was feasible in this welter of incompatible lovers—that between the manly chauffeur and the little flower of the chorus. So much jumped to the eyes of everybody except the authors.

Only extreme brilliance in the acting could have made such a success of this material. Miss Olga Lindo

turned Millie's honest gold into the best kind of theatrical glitter, dazzling the spectator with that riot of vivacity, repartee, good nature, and cleverly simulated vulgarity which has been in the best tradition of English comic acting since the days of Mrs. Jordan ; Miss Nora Swinburne's Marion suggested that this was not the first time that shrew, vixen, or minx had been the heroine of an English comedy ; and Miss Maisie Darrell distilled fragrance from the flower-like Alice as though that little person had been extract of Sweet Lavender. On the male side, Mr. Hugh Williams's Bertie skilfully confounded our notions of the graceless and the graceful ; and Mr. Ian Hunter, who, as everybody knows, is a most accomplished and intelligent actor, was content to leave brains out of it and rely upon the chauffeur's brawn.

So much for the young people. The elders lagged no wit behind in the matter of virtuosity. Miss Henrietta Watson, showing an unsuspected talent for clowning, turned the mother into a whirling dervish of perturbation and danced round her drawing-room like a ramrod in hysterics. Then we had delight in Mr. C. V. France, covering up the portentous owlishness of the Heavy Father with easy suavity, in Mr. Frederick Volpé, whose Uncle suffered with wooden impassivity all that banter to which his snobbishness and corpulence gave lawful rise, and in Mr. Kenneth Kove, whose spindle-shanked, cretinous chip of the peerage was pure joy. As for Miss Dora Gregory, I can only say that, as usual, she very nearly wrecked the play. So great are

this artist's powers of truth and actuality that each and every one of her characters is like a charge of explosive. Another minute of Miss Gregory and the whole piece would have gone up in the air.

To conclude, this unpretentious farce has no wit and no semblance of anything approaching style. But it would be a great mistake to deny that it entertains. That, at least, it does to perfection. Here exactly is a play which non-Tchehovians will adore. It isn't like anything that we surmise abroad; and that it isn't like anything we know at home is neither here nor there.

March 21.

"The Firebrand"

A Comedy by EDWIN JUSTUS MAYER

Wyndham's Theatre

THIS unfatiguing drama of Florentine life under the Medicis follows the lines prescribed for masterpieces of this order. First, the dresses exhaust all that the costumier's art holds of magnificence, so that the stage comes to look like a painting of Paul Veronese. Not a worn, shabby picture, you understand, with what Henry James calls the "tone of time" about it, but a brand new affair wet from the master's brush.

The second item in the prescription is that the characters inhaling the warm, languorous Italian air of the sixteenth century shall exhale purely English hot air of the early twentieth. The author tells us that his play is a "Comedy in the Romantic Spirit," a title which, one suggests, would apply to *Much Ado About Nothing*. It brings up the old question, "What is romance?" Pedants and learned folk generally are very apt with their definitions which define nothing, and leave the average man where he was. What do we, being average men, mean by the romantic? For me,

personally, the spirit is best captured in one little stanza of Arthur Rimbaud's *Bateau Ivre :*

> I want no water of Europe but the cold,
> Dark puddle a sad-hearted child squats by,
> And launches out towards the scented dusk
> A boat as frail as a May butterfly.

It would appear that the romantic vaccine "takes" our author in a similar way. His lover advises his mistress that "These moments are like white butterflies perfuming the way to the unknown." But those who lay down the rules have decided that whom on the stage romantic speech hath joined together modern slang shall quickly put asunder. And so we find the lover breaking away from his mistress to break it to her mother that "the thing you wear cannot possibly be a face." Or, say, the talk is of dying. "Terrible 'tis," says Cellini—I forgot to say that this play is about Benvenuto Cellini—"terrible 'tis to be wrapped for ever in a hideous futility," thus recalling Claudio's thick-ribbed ice and viewless winds. But he quickly tempers poetic severity by adding : "We are wise to hang on to things as long as we can." The modern idiom is common to all the personages in the play. Alessandro de Medici, Duke of Florence, being invited to hang Cellini, demands that he shall not be "rushed." Or he will say to his ladylove, "You are giving the game away." And so on and so forth.

But this is not to declare the piece unamusing. On the contrary, it has been amusing for over three hundred years. Cellini makes his first entrance after a street

brawl with some half-dozen swaggerers. Whereupon his friend says, "Pray God you have not murdered some of them," and Cellini replies, as near as I can remember, "Nay, that's past praying for; I have peppered two of them, two, I am sure I have paid, two rogues in buckram suits. Four rogues in buckram let drive at me, and I made no more ado but took all their seven points in my target, thus." Well, it always was a good joke, and serves your thin sculptor as well as your fat knight. Probably the best scene in the play is that in which the Duke and Duchess emerge from their several bedrooms upon the same balcony, he hoping to find the sculptor's model, and she to find the sculptor. But the pair have put a good half-mile of scented dusk behind them, and the Duke and Duchess are left exchanging commonplaces about the weather.

As rare young Ben Mr. Ivor Novello has a part which fits him every whit as well as those wonderful hose. Time has written no wrinkle on that azure leg, and the actor annihilates all that his playwright has made to a jade thought in a shirt of jade. I venture to think that Mr. Novello is a much better artist than his admirers will allow him to be. We all know what Pascal said about Cleopatra's nose, and one feels that the tiniest blain on the countenance of this player would change the whole face of this play. Of course no artist could ever have talked the unmitigated bosh that falls from this hero's lips, and it is largely to Mr. Novello's credit that he makes it sound like mitigated bosh. Mr. Novello moves gracefully, shows feeling

for the stage, holds the spectator's attention while he is on it, has magnetism, and is obviously trying. But at the present moment his public—and he is known to have as large a following as any three prima donnas put together—want him to go on being just himself. They like him enormously, and it is obvious that he enormously likes being liked. Watch him take his calls, note how radiantly he smiles and how much lower than anybody else he bows. Fortunately in the case of very beautiful and charming people youth is a stuff that really will endure, and therefore it may never be necessary for Mr. Novello to impersonate somebody else. But isn't there tragic irony in a fate which relentlessly condemns one who would be an artist to continue for ever being loved for himself alone?

I read recently in one of our current novels of passion the following sentence: "She looked snooply, and her eyes wickered." This epitomises our author's view of the Duchess of Florence, and Miss Constance Collier lends these operations the best of her dignity and beauty. How would it be if, having made two studies of disappointed beldams, she were now to give us a full-length portrait of "cette pauvre Madame Potiphar?" She is always magnificiently Egyptian, and there is no doubt about her being able to stand up to the Pyramids. One of the great hits of the evening was made by Mr. Hugh Wakefield as the Duke. This actor possesses a brand of humour which defies both nationalities and centuries, that of the rather simple English younger son who is sent up to, and down from,

Oxford for no particular reason. A' babbles like Verdant Green, and it is all very entertaining. Possibly the best performance was that of Miss Ursula Jeans as Cellini's model. "I like being chased," she said, simply, and in those words revealed the stupid content of the exquisite vessel.

February 14.

"Israel in the Kitchen"

A Play by NOAH ELSTEIN

London Pavilion

IF Mr. Noah Elstein had been the product of Prague or Budapest, and if *Israel in the Kitchen* had been produced by Mr. Komisarjevsky and acted by a company of Russians, there can be little doubt that we should now be acclaiming a genius and a masterpiece. But it is only fair to add that an organisation like the Moscow Art Theatre would have got out of the play every ounce of virtue there was in it instead of leaving its quality almost totally unexplored. This was the play's sad fate on Sunday last. There are twelve characters, and only three of the players divined and reproduced the author's intentions to the point of making us fully aware of them. One of the major characters was so triumphantly miscast that no acting skill could save it, one performer chose to be theatrical instead of naturalistic, another was allowed to over-act grossly, and three characters were so poorly played as to be ineffective. The piece was produced by a member of the company, and one wondered again why actors imagine that they can be on both sides of the curtain at one and the same

time. With the exception of three brilliant individual performances the piece was a bungle from beginning to end. I am the more sorry because I had the honour of being one of the three judges who chose *Israel in the Kitchen* as the prize play for the Jewish Drama League. I can only wish the author better luck next time, or suggest to him that if he insists upon a producer of the calibre of Mr. Komisarjevsky he can probably leave luck out of the question.

I am not going to claim that this play is a masterpiece, or anything approaching one. What I do claim is that it is a truthful representation of a humble phase of existence as that phase is lived and spoken. The piece is true to the visible and audible aspects of Jewish life in the slums, and true also to the unspoken aspirations of those who conform and those who rebel. The family is an entity, bone of Jewish bone and flesh of Jewish flesh ; they live under the same roof and engage in common ties. The head of this family is the mother, the father being a failure owning no dignity save the patriarch's. Mrs. Israel's spiritual home is still the Waters of Babylon, and she resembles cherubim and seraphim in that she continually doth cry. She is a Mrs. Gummidge with accretions of temperament and the German quality of *Humor*. Woe is unto her a luxury and relaxation, and her comic lamentations are piled one upon another like a Victorian candelabrum, so that the weeper becomes a veritable tree of grief, her arms continually raised to heaven branch-charmèd, as the poet might have said, by her unlucky stars. Her

two sons carry the attributes of the race to the point of perversion where they bring tragic disaster. Hymy is made up of the pride which in a mean mind is turned to mean ends, and Peretz has the humility of the worm which will not turn, though mountains tread upon it. There are two daughters. Laya, the elder, has slaved away her life and prospects to supply her father's deficiencies, keep the family, and provide the funds which are necessary before even the most managing mother can " manage." She is an idealist whose faith in the radiance of an ideal is not dimmed by the ideal's impracticability. Ray, the younger daughter, is a pragmatist who knows she must find a way of escape. That way lies through marriage out of her race.

Again one would not claim that the author is an Ibsen or even a Bernstein. Every dramatic attempt at the working-out of character has to be accompanied by some kind of story, and the incident used by Mr. Elstein as a peg is the false accusation of Peretz that he is a receiver of stolen goods. There is some business here of a comic uncle who is the thief, a barrister from London, and burlesque detectives who at the end call ostensibly to acquit the young man but really to wet their whistles. All this is not only not very good, but, in addition, is noisy and bustling enough to obscure the real tragedy of the young man, which is that willy-nilly he must resign his last hope of freedom and marry out of gratitude the warm-hearted, perceptionless Jewess, who, with her savings, has found his bail and

opened a little grocery shop in which they may be happy together. Peretz and his sister Ray are spiritually a cut above the rest of the family, and their common tragedy is that while he must remain for ever " in the kitchen " she escapes into the even commoner world of the young man who can say of her religion : " I thought you'd chuck that stuff overboard same as I've done ours." For the other members of the family there is no hope. The father will still pursue penury and the mother wail to heaven, the elder brother will become a racecourse tout or worse, and the elder daughter will reap no reward for forty years of unselfishness. The play has some actively bad writing, and some passages of passive ineffectiveness, but, at least, it bears the impress of truth, and it is truth about things which matter.

But the performance was so poor that if I had not read the play beforehand it is very probable that I should not have grasped any of the author's intentions. The essence of Peretz is that he shall be likeable and claim our interest from the rise of the curtain. Whereas the actor gave the young man a make-up and a manner which repelled our sympathies, and spoke his lines in such a way that every sentence tailed off into nothingness, suggesting weakness in the player rather than in the character. Miss Beatrice Lewisohn as the elder daughter was utterly miscast. The play abounds in signposts, such as " a monstrosity like Laya " and " the everlasting problem of Laya." Obviously Laya must have lost her looks, which gives point to her odd and

pitiful attempts at retrieval by means of a lipstick and gay apparel. But equally obviously Miss Lewisohn was the most attractive person on the stage. The producer should have insisted either upon the deletion of good looks and attractiveness or the substitution of an actress who can simulate the plain and faded. The remainder of the spiritual values was in the hands of Miss Delia Dellvina, who, after her good performance in *Children of the Moon*, was quite astonishingly ineffective. Miss Dellvina doubtless had the root of the matter in her, but did not give us the flower. Mr. Hector Abbas was handicapped by a sonority of voice and largeness of presence which made one think that Lessing and *Nathan der Weise* were more his game. The warm-hearted Jewess of Miss Efga Myers was inadequate, and there was a boisterous ten minutes during which that clever actress, Miss Drusilla Wills, was allowed to indulge in the humours of drunkenness as the music-hall understands that failing. The author was doubtless something to blame here, but good production would have lessened the riot to a hint. On the credit side of the account were the really brilliant performances of Mme. Fanny Waxman as Mrs. Israel, Mr. F. V. Owen as Hymy, and Mr. Herman de Lange as the Uncle.

When the piece is next played I suggest that the attempt at a half-Jewish, half-Lancashire accent should be abandoned. Even if such an accent exist it is almost impossible to reproduce it on the stage. The actors wavered between the integrities of two lingoes,

and never the twain did meet. Only those were successful who forgot Lancashire and went all out for Houndsditch.

December 12.

Adaptations

"The Mayor of Casterbridge"

Dramatised from the Novel of THOMAS HARDY by JOHN DRINKWATER

Barnes Theatre

"DEUCE take it," said the simpering gentleman with the weak legs, "I'd rather be knocked down by a man with blood in him than be picked up by a man who hadn't." I own to a sneaking sympathy with David Copperfield's fellow-guest at Mr. Waterbrook's dinner party. For myself, deuce take it, I would rather be amused by a playwright who cold-shouldered the unities than bored by one who made too much of them. But a play must have one sort of unity, the unity of emotion. Mr. Drinkwater has been defending himself, one suggests, a trifle unnecessarily against the charge of applying film methods to the dramatisation of Mr. Hardy's novel. He could not have done otherwise. But one cannot pretend that Mr. Drinkwater has succeeded in binding up the seventeen episodes into a dramatic whole. There is no informing tragic spirit, the theme loses momentum instead

of gaining it, and in the end the central figure goes to pieces. This is largely, one suggests, because the adapter had too much story to deal with, the details of which have a crowded, frittering effect. We cannot see the tree for the commotion among the leaves. The fault, I make bold to say, is not in Mr. Drinkwater. It was inherent in his task and no amount of skill could have overcome it.

Is it too much to say that a great novel should never be dramatised? Or to think that now that we have the film there is less justification than ever for the tighter, tauter form? The novelist uses a huge canvas, and the reading of his book may take days. The film-writer uses up thousands of feet of celluloid, and the seeing of his story may take a week or more. I suggest, very diffidently and tentatively, that a novel may be a great novel, say, like *Tom Jones*, or *Great Expectations*, or *Vanity Fair* without being anything more than a tale—though a tale in the widest, richest meaning of the word—but that a play cannot be great unless it embodies and is unified by a single idea or emotion, which is the sum of all its ideas and emotions. It is all a question of frame or no frame. Mr. Galsworthy's *The Silver Box* is as finite as a picture hung on a wall; his *Forsyte Saga* is an unending tapestry. I imagine it would bother Mr. Drinkwater to make a play out of that; and he has had a similar difficulty with *The Mayor of Casterbridge*.

The piece begins finely with the prologue in which Henchard, being drunk, sells his wife and child to a

sailor. And being well-trained playgoers we settle down to see Retribution overtake the headstrong hay-trusser. The theme which presents itself to our minds is the insufficiency of man to be sufficient unto himself; and we await the overtaking of strength by its own weakness. Eighteen years pass and Henchard has prospered and is now Mayor. He has kept his vow of abstention from liquor, is still ashamed of his drunken act, but has apparently got on very well without Susan, having taken a mistress whom he is on the point of marrying. Now Susan, widowed, turns up again with his beautiful daughter. Renunciation of the fascinating mistress, reunion with the country woman, shabby, worn, and below the class to which the Mayor has attained—this, we presume, is to be Retribution's first instalment. But no. The mistress allows herself to be bought off, the wife has come by a faded, wan gentility, the daughter is pretty as a peach, and the wedding bells ring merrily for this second marrying as for a first.

Is Retribution going to score because Farfrae, Henchard's young employé, looks like capturing the town, and the corn factor's trade, by his likeableness and modesty? No, because Farfrae loves Elizabeth Jane, the daughter, and there is no reason why everything should not be kept in the family. And then Susan dies, which is in the way of Nature, not Retribution. Five minutes after Henchard has revealed to a shrinking Elizabeth Jane that he is her father, a letter discloses that he isn't. His change of manner dis-

tresses the girl, who has thought the matter over and has decided to adopt Henchard with a good grace. On the stage these too-rapid tergiversations have a comic effect, and we find ourselves murmuring irreverently, "Whose baby are you?" Is Henchard's punishment to consist in losing daughter and ducats also? No, for the mistress, now an heiress, turns up with the intention of marrying Henchard, who, being poor, magnanimously declines her self-sacrifice. Retribution having failed to overtake the Mayor for his evil deeds, Chance whimsically decides to punish him for a good one. Lucetta, meeting Farfrae, "falls for" him at sight, which depends not upon headstrongness but pure accident. A hurly-burly ensues, in which Henchard tries to kill Farfrae, or at least poison his happiness by revealing the facts of the situation. He fails in both, Later the villagers take a hand by making a public mock of Henchard and Mrs. Farfrae, so that the woman dies in childbirth, which punishes the innocent Farfrae. Ultimately the sailor, who was never drowned, turns up with a fortune, which he proposes to bestow upon Elizabeth Jane, who, of course, is now going to marry Farfrae. But Henchard lies and says the girl is dead, hoping, presumably, to keep her as comfort for himself. Ultimately, when the sailor discovers the lie, Henchard takes to the road, presumably in fear of his life.

Well, this is a long, rambling tale, stragglesome as a village street, from which in the theatre one can disengage no *motif*, no ruling theme. Incident is heaped

pell-mell upon incident till the whole thing is as meaningless as the changing patterns in a kaleidoscope. The novelist has time to make credible the wife who turns up after eighteen years, the daughter who has a different father according to the time of day, the mistress who allows herself to be discarded and resumed as occasion demands, the sailor who sinks or swims as the turn in the plot wills. Transferred to the stage these things lose their impressiveness. The fault is obviously not Mr. Hardy's, neither is it Mr Drinkwater's. You cannot get a quart into a pint pot. What is more important still is that you cannot get even a pint of novel into a pint of drama. The measure is wrong in itself. The best success an adaptation can achieve is to send playgoers back to the book. It is obvious throughout that we are in the presence of a noble mind made to express itself in a language of which the words do not correspond, and of a work finely tragic in its own medium and melodramatic in another.

I thought Mr. Lyn Harding, an admirable melodramatic player, to be quite pointedly miscast. He was too much the actor throughout, too much the lordly vessel, goodly and magnificent, and going large before the wind. When he swept from side to side of the small stage in a long black cloak, I thought of Richard's "Shine out, fair sun, till I have bought a glass." And once or twice Mr. Bransby Williams would come to mind. What was wanted here was an introspective, Ibsenite actor, or, of course, Mr. Sam Livesey, who can be real. Whereas this Henchard

was simply a stage figure in a stage play. Mesdames Christine Silver and Moyna Macgill were excellent as mother and daughter, and Miss Louise Prussing caught the very note of Mr. Hardy's well-to-do people, the note of faint incredibility. Mr. Basil Dyne was magnificently bucolic.

September 12.

"Riceyman Steps"

A Play. Adapted from the Novel of ARNOLD BENNETT by MICHAEL MORTON

Ambassadors Theatre

THERE can be no doubt that in adapting and producing *Riceyman Steps*, Messrs. Morton and Lion have accomplished a labour of love. I am reminded in this connection of the bear who, endeavouring with his paw to remove a fly from the face of a sleeping infant, dealt the babe such a terrific blow that it never recovered. The simile is not quite accurate because a great literary masterpiece has this quality, that though you hurl the pyramids of Egypt at it, it will remain unshaken. Masterpieces like matter are indestructible, and you cannot destroy them even by producing them on the stage. The worst you can do is to turn a great book into a poor play, which really doesn't hurt the book at all. In China if you have a grievance against a man you go and commit suicide on his doorstep, which is said to hurt him deeply. This is virtually what Messrs. Morton and Lion have done. Their earnest endeavours have ended in their own immolation, while Mr. Bennett and his masterpiece sleep unhurt.

Years ago the great Samuel Butler, by whom I mean the modern readable genius of that name, took a walk down Cheapside, and in a shop window saw some turtles which were to be the most intimate guests at the Lord Mayor's banquet. Gazing at the shop-window Butler reflected that the turtle who is eaten by an Alderman becomes in some sense Alderman. But he also reflected that the Alderman who eats a turtle himself becomes turtle. From this the old gentleman went on to write an extremely entertaining essay. He laid it down that we are all members of one another to a much greater degree than any of us is aware. Pain in the solicitor, he said, is extremely disagreeable, but a wound in the bank manager is apt to prove fatal.

When you have read a great work by a great writer you become ever after part of that writer, and he becomes part of you. Henry James said that no man who has read Balzac can ever be quite the same man again. Viola Meynell writes in her preface to *Moby Dick*, "to know this writer is to be partly made of him for ever." And I say that to have read *Riceyman Steps* is to be partly made of Mr. Bennett for the rest of your life. Mr. Bennett, you must note, has no more choice in the matter than the turtle in the Cheapside window. Thus a great writer may be said to permeate the consciousness of his time. No author can be so unlucky as to escape the consequences of his masterpiece. If they be not now yet they will come.

Mr. Lion, the producer of this play, has told us in a very interesting article how he sets about producing

adaptations. " First," he says, " I read the book right through, obtain the first vivid impressions, lay the book aside, and then get to work on the high lights." What are the high lights in *Riceyman Steps?* Well, first there is the wooing of Mrs. Arb, the bright business-woman, by Mr. Earlforward, the miserly bookseller. Then there is the increasing passion of avarice in the husband and acquiescence by his wife, who not only starves herself till she is so weak that she dies under an operation, but also allows her husband to die of under-nourishment. While this is going on we have the servant Elsie, the principal events of whose existence are her love affair with Joe, the victim of shell shock, her lover's self-imposed banishment, the infliction upon her also of something approaching starvation, her passionate faithfulness to her two tyrants, her nursing of her returned lover, whom she married after the death of her employers. These things have been faithfully put into stage form by Mr. Morton and faithfully put on the stage by Mr. Lion. But on the stage the characters cannot explain themselves, for the simple reason that the motives which dominate them cannot be explained through their own mouths. It is utterly incredible to anybody in the theatre that a wife who has a fortune of her own and who loves her husband passionately should allow him to starve. No reason is given why she does not take her husband by the shoulders, shake him into his senses, and force the food down his throat. Why, you ask impatiently, doesn't Violet threaten to leave Henry ? Now in the book all

this is dealt with. Mr. Bennett explains very carefully that the reason the wife cannot so threaten him is because she knows that the threat will fail. Henry would allow her to go. And her love for him is greater than the fear of that starvation which she sees coming. Then there is a second motive also explained by Mr. Bennett, which is that Violet makes several revolts, knowing that they cannot succeed and for the sole pleasure of ultimately yielding. That which on the stage is incomprehensible is quite comprehensible in the story. The wife who is a careful creature at the beginning, but not more than careful, cultivates the passion of avarice, which she then offers as a sacrifice to her lord and master. I am not going to insist upon the more obvious stage impossibilities in the presentation of this novel. One of the most effective things in the book is the nursing by Elsie of her master in one room and her lover in the room above. The tension here is extraordinary, and the reader is held in fearful suspense as to the risk of discovery of such a piece of heroism. It is not possible to give this on the stage.

But now I come to a second kind of high light, which is this. Henry Earlforward is not the whole book in the sense in which old Grandet in Balzac's *Eugénie Grandet* is the whole novel, and in which Macbeth is the whole play. Earlforward is only a part of *Riceyman Steps* and really a quite inconsiderable part. For though every page seems to be concerned with the little bookseller, what the book as a whole is concerned with is the life of Clerkenwell,

of whose many thousand inhabitants Earlforward is but one, and with the life of which all the inhabitants of Clerkenwell taken together are but a small part. Ever through the pages we are conscious of the march of Time and filled with the sense of man's individual life which is no more than a bar in the great score of human existence—the sense of the Earlforwards who pass and the Clerkenwell which remains. The play was bound to end with the obvious high light which is the death of the bookseller. But no sooner is that character dead than Mr. Bennett, with great art, proceeds to show how the book shop is taken over by the little grocer and the place of Henry Earlforward knows him no more. The man whose life we have been following for so many pages is blotted out, even almost to memory. We have forgotten him in the last pages, and as we follow Elsie and her lover up the Clerkenwell Street there is an almost boundless release of heart and mind. We are in life again, and Clerkenwell goes on. It is this which gives the book its meaning and unity ; reading it we feel that though there may be backwaters of meanness the great life-stream is, and must be, generous. Seeing the play we do not feel that there is any question of the life-stream ; our attention is concentrated upon waters foul and stagnant and land-locked.

The scene depicting *Riceyman Steps* was admirably contrived in the acted play, yet one was not conscious of busy Clerkenwell, nor of the underground trains which shake its fabric. This world held no more

people than the characters on the stage. I do not know how this could have been altered, but whereas the book teems with life the stage teemed with emptiness. One could not trace in Violet the long degradation brought about by the lust for subjugating her will to her passion. Then it must be said that the part was miscast. Throughout the first two acts Miss Hilda Trevelyan endowed Violet with the familiar charm of little mothers whom the years cannot age ; it is the fate of this actress that she can neither grow old, nor pretend it. Whereas Mrs. Arb should have the bright, hard charm of forty. We are told that she had a cancer, which was not a physical one—the secret abiding terror lest despite all her outward assurance she might be incapable of managing her possessions. But it is one thing for a novelist to tell us of a contradiction, and another thing for an actress to suggest it. Miss Trevelyan has far too great an inheritance of setting people and things to rights to persuade us that she could have failed at righting not only her own shop, but also Henry's habits, mind, and character. The adapter-playwright necessarily demands too much. To ask any actress to say " It's very tender " and imply that steak at tea-time is " a commonplace matter, not unique and breath-taking in the annals of *Riceyman Steps* " is Lord Burleigh's nod all over again. In the last act Miss Trevelyan acted as finely as might be, but the good-humoured managing mischief was already done.

Mr. Lion appeared to play the first two acts entirely

for sympathy, translating Henry's expostulatory mildness into active charm. Henry is really iron painted to look like a lath. Here again one might suggest that the actor is being asked to do something which is hardly within the compass of his art. Mr. Bennett gives his miser no explosions by which we can measure his passion ; we are content to take the novelist's word for it. But the actor must be given something beyond mere passivity. And the gentleness of Henry made it conceivable that while his right hand was busy scraping and saving, his left hand was quietly disbursing charity. There was a winsome sprightliness about Henry which endured until he suddenly contracted cancer and the hands of a man of ninety whose cheek remained unwithered. After that and to the end of the long death agony Mr. Lion enjoyed himself mightily.

It is Elsie who keeps Mr. Bennett's book sane and healthy, redeems it from the sordid agglomeration, and relates it to the whole of life. But in the play she is a lesser figure. Her servitude becomes perfunctory and sentimental, and that twofold hunger which makes the reader's mind ache is not more than hinted at. Miss Ffrangçon-Davies made a fine thing of the handful of the part which was left to her. Though in her physical appearance flatly contradicting Mr. Bennett's description, this actress was probably very close to the reader's conception. Mr. Bennett postulates a " strongly-built wench, plump, fairly tall, with the striking, free, powerful carriage of one bred to various and hard

manual labour." Her arms and bust are "superb," her waist is "magnificent." But if the author can propose, the reader has power to dispose. It is not easy to consent to the magnificent waif and the superb stray, and at the heart of Mr. Bennett's character is the humble little spar floating on the Clerkenwell sea. Therefore one thinks that Miss Davies looked right in the part, and she certainly acted with perfect perception and rightness of execution.

If anybody had inquired whom one would least willingly cast for Joe one might have suggested Mr. Frederick Cooper, the impersonator of the flash young gentleman in *Outward Bound*, the flash detective in *The Ghost Train*, and the gay spark in half a dozen pieces, including *Hamlet*. But Mr. Cooper is also an actor, that phenomenon so hardly grasped by the manager who insists upon type. His Joe was a creature of intense actuality, heart-breaking in its suggestion of mind and body broken by war. Since some of the audience appeared not to understand Joe's excitement, I think that some allusion to shell shock ought to be made before he appears. It could be managed by giving the doctor a few words with Elsie before he goes over to the bookseller's. A smaller knife should also be used. The novelist can condone a bread-knife ; on the stage it is too nearly ludicrous. But these things were outside Mr. Cooper's acting, which brought the play home to Clerkenwell.

November 23.

"The Constant Nymph"

A Play by MARGARET KENNEDY and BASIL DEAN

New Theatre

THIS piece begins with the Artistic Temperament and ends with Heart Disease. I have, unfortunately, not read Miss Kennedy's novel, but I glean from the play that Sanger was a colossal artist who spent the greater part of his existence in dram-drinking, begetting children and other heroic dissipation of energy. There is a lot of nonsense written in connection with this business of being a great artist. It may be that inspiration comes to a man in a mood of exaltation, and is brought about by such different things as a pinch of dope or a climb among mountain tops. But that mood accounts for no more than the original conception. Behind every work of art, behind every poem, painting or piece of acting, there is, there must be, an immense amount of sheer, solid hard work, which can only be executed in soberness. The artist cannot be a creature of dissipation by the very meaning of the word. In fact, one of the disabilities attaching to the artistic profession is that it gives you

no time for going to the devil. Let me inconceivably suppose that Mr. Selfridge or Lord Rothermere or Mr. Cochran should drink a thimbleful too much champagne or smoke one cigar too many. Is it thinkable that next morning the Stores would close, the *Daily Mail* default or the Albert Hall fall down ? No. Yet in like circumstances the creative artist would have to shut up shop for the day. A man who is always drunk cannot always be composing fine symphonies. And, therefore, I presume that Sanger must have had his lucid intervals, and that in those intervals his lucidity must have been, as Dick Phenyl says, " devilish."

I am far more inclined to believe in Sanger's disregard of appearances. After all, no artist who is really an artist cares anything at all for the world outside his art or for anybody outside himself. Always provided, of course, that his disregard of the conventions does not deprive him of his livelihood. The artist who is really an artist and has an independent income of five pounds a week, or even two, cares nothing whatever what the world about him may say. He belongs to a superior race and he knows it. Anybody can build a Forth Bridge, or at least span the river with something or other which will bring Scotchmen and their luggage over the border. Anybody can run a huge store. Or if they can't it doesn't matter, for there will always be somebody to sell one hats and ũmbrellas. Anybody, in short, can do any job in the world outside the realm of art, *or something that will do as well.* But nobody

except Milton could have written *Lycidas*, and nobody except Wagner could have composed *Tristan*. To do them justice, both artists knew it, and to do us justice we know that no other compositions could have taken the places of these two. None would have " done as well." Therefore, I would advance my argument a step further and declare the artist to be free of all those shackles and restraints which bind the ordinary man, were it not for the fact that the unbinding would immediately prove fatal, both to the artist and to his art. What it comes to is this : the artist is a superior being who has got to behave himself rather better than the average man under penalty not only of losing his superiority, but of being of less use and service to the world than a pew-opener or a stockbroker or anybody who has never bothered his head about art.

And now to my notice proper.

There are best sellers and best sellers. There is the confection concerning the loves of Sir Gervase Devereux, Baronet, and Elaine Pigot, the shorthand typist—a cloying sub-Garvicious sweetmeat feverishly absorbed in 'bus or tube and between the hours of ten and six folded in two to fit the hand-bag. The name of the confectioner is unknown even to the millions whom his wares delight. Then there is the higher-grade bosh confessing a name sufficiently notorious to act as a deterrent to any connoisseur of dust covers. Next we have the best-seller *pur sang*, which everybody pretends to despise and nobody can help reading if and when the long winter evening comes But there is yet another

class—the best seller by inadvertence. There are two explanations for this type. One is that just as the sun will sometimes shine even in an English summer, so the public will sometimes buy the highest when it is for sale. The other is that the writer, having given his story the sentimental core beloved of the multitude, has had the supreme luck not to offend with the artistry with which he has surrounded that core. This is the class to which, although unfortunately I have only my knowledge of the play to go upon, I instinctively assign Miss Kennedy's novel.

The Constant Nymph must always be happy in three themes which no amount of good writing could ever defeat. First there is the "heart-of-a-child" theme, perennially refreshing in a world grown sick of war, war debts, labour leading and misleading, and all the other knavish trickeries of the grown spirit. Tessa is flower-like, and it will be a sorry age when we are not moved by the spectacle of virginal purity and fineness of mind going hand in hand with a sense of fun and a healthy knowledge of life. Tessa is a twentieth-century heroine with nothing of that "softness of mind amounting almost to feebleness" which rendered Lucy dear to Edgar Ravenswood. It is Tessa's firmness of mind which endears her to Lewis Dodd. I am less sure about the validity of the second theme—the early dying. There never was any reason why the naughty heroines of Prévost, Murger, and Dumas should find Heaven by the consumptive route except that death pays all and secures the moral ending. There

is no reason that I can see why Miss Kennedy's good little woman should not have borne her husband a brood of sturdy, constant little children. Tessa towards the end becomes uncommonly like Miss Alcott's Beth March with the addition of a grand passion. And since Chance has a place in this world as well as Design, we must perhaps consent that those whom both gods and stalls love shall die young. Certainly Tessa's death scene is very affecting, and it is perhaps foolish to demand that it should have further significance. A good cry is its own justification.

The third theme is the age-long one of the conflict between respectability and the artistic temperament. I am not quite clear whether we are asked to assume that because Sanger was a great composer he was bound to take to brandy, women and winking at his family's irregular habits, or that it was these laxities and irresponsibilities which gave him his inspiration and so led to his being a great composer. Here I must at the risk of being tedious insist again that one of the disabilities attaching to a great artist's career is that he cannot indulge in dissipation as freely as other men. A muddled stockbroker need not desist from stock-broking because of the night before, whereas a fuddled contrapuntist must give up his fugue for the day. But whether it is the artistic dog which cannot help wagging a vicious tail or whether it is the waggish tail which gives the dog its temperament, is not really to the point. It is tacitly assumed, at least in the play, that Sanger being the artist he was could not help doing the things

he did, and that he and Lewis Dodd belong to a race which is entitled to make its own laws. "You expect art to be turned on like the electric light," says Lewis scornfully, and we feel we are expected to forgive in the artist conduct which we should not tolerate in the electrician. I am conscious that this is not the place fully to combat or defend such a thesis. But it is necessary to state it, since it largely explains the play's success. The point is that the public which is most obedient to Mrs. Grundy at home and most likes to flout her in the theatre is the Great English Public which provides ninety-nine per cent. of playgoers. In view of these three themes—child-heroine, early demise and the artistic clash—how could *The Constant Nymph* be a failure?

But a piece built on these lines might yet reek horribly of mawkishness. This play is good because, though it contains plenty of sentiment, it is entirely free from sentimentality. It is good because though it is of the theatre it is never theatrical. We can see through it into the lives of people who have had an existence before we came into the play-house, and will go on having one after we have left it. It is good because of the obvious beauty of the principal character. Tessa, besides knowing a child's depth of suffering, has all a child's intuition, and it is a very poignant moment when, taking her imagination by the hand, she declares knowledge of the whole of love, and is misunderstood by Florence. The part was almost unimaginably well played by Miss Edna Best, who looked and breathed

the single mind and loyal purpose. This performance had many beautiful moments. There was one when Tessa awoke from her trance at the end of the musical charade, another when Sanger's death made her call out to that other heart of hers beating in the body of Lewis, a third when she broke from Lewis's love-making, and a fourth when she asked him to kiss her as for the last time. But then, Miss Best's playing throughout the whole of that last scene was extraordinarily firm and sensitive. It was as though the childish spirit which hitherto had known nothing perfectly except anguish had been suddenly touched to the fuller comprehension of womanhood.

The play is good because of the absence of exaggeration in the drawing of Florence, who seems to me to be entirely lifelike. The eager, predatory, absorbing female who, besides marrying the man, wants to mate with the artist so that she can brood over genius and hatch out its works to her own snobbish advancement—the character is admirably caught. "It must be splendid," Florence says, "to live with a genius and help him in his work." And, groaning, we at once foresee for Lewis the dreary vista of musical At Homes at which all the musical nobs will be nobbled and prospective patrons petted. Somebody, I forget who, has talked of *la peinture à quatre mains;* the fate of one who must compose in double harness is equally horrible. The only thing that anybody can do for any genius is to feed him, inspire him at a discreet distance, and keep the bailiffs away. But Florence did not know

this. Neither did she know that when her husband realised his love for Tessa the quickest and surest way to bring about catastrophe was to behave badly to the child and talk of doubling her love for Lewis. Had Florence behaved decently to Tessa and doubled her affection without talking about it she would at least have had Lewis's compassion and sense of decency left as spars to cling to. Instead of which she upset the boat and was drowned. All this is very well observed, and Miss Cathleen Nesbitt did perfect justice to the thinly concealed egotism, the quick resentments and returns to surface-calm and affability. The part is not only very difficult, but it is against the sympathies of the audience throughout. Miss Nesbitt gave every shade its full and exact value, and her performance was very justly acclaimed. For the first time in my experience a musician of genius was credibly put on the stage, and I even believed in the symphony ! Mr. Noel Coward played Lewis very well, with a complete waywardness which lost no hold on virility and an excellent sense of the shifting emotional values.

Probably the play, if it had been conceived as a play, would have been a trifle less stragglesome. Linda, admirably acted by Miss Mary Clare, Kate Sanger, excellently played by Miss Marie Ney, Trigorin, de-Russianised by Mr. Aubrey Mather to the likeness of a typical British taxpayer, Jacob Birnbaum, whose accent and spirit were capitally caught by Mr. Kenneth Kent—all these necessarily fade away. Antonia, interpreted by Miss Elissa Landi with great spirit, seems to

demand a play to herself, and we want to know more of Miss Helen Spencer's Paulina. But over-crowding is inherent in any adaptation of any novel, and our complaint is really that of a man set down to a banquet with too little time in which to do it justice. Still, I suggest that the first act, which runs to an hour and a quarter, is too long, and that the musical charade might be shortened, preserving however the moment at the end when Lewis and Tessa stare into each other's face and prepare us for all that is to come.

The second and third acts are as taut as the greatest stickler for well-made play-making could desire. The production was admirable throughout, and Mr. Dean has probably never done anything better than that amusing musical party. The last scene was as good as good can be, from the time when Lewis put his feet on the counterpane—a piece of admirable naturalism masking a moment of some difficulty—to the manœuvre at the end which made the lovers sit on the bed side by side and give you their profiles as on a medallion. The exquisiteness of this last scene lingered in the mind long after the curtain had fallen. Good performances were also given by Mesdames Marjorie Gabain and Margot Sieveking, and Messrs. David Hawthorne, Tony de Lungo, and Craighall Sherry. Is it possible that Mr. Harold Scott, though entertaining, was a little too much afraid of speaking up ? Miss Margaret Yarde at last gave one an opportunity for something less than fulsomeness : she had obviously steeped herself too much and too recently in Mr.

Maugham's Papuan duennas to be quite credible as a Belgian landlady.

But the whole thing—play, production, casting, acting—was really very good. It would be ungracious to insist upon the absence of certain qualities which go to make up a great as distinct from a good play—poetry, atmosphere, strangeness in beauty, and so forth. One would not claim too much for *The Constant Nymph.* But for people who can recognise a plain, unvarnished transcript from life and like a good play "with no nonsense about it," I can imagine nothing better. Every moment of the piece, except perhaps the over-long charade in the first act, held the house in thrall.

September 19.

"The Man Who Was Thursday"

ADAPTED FROM G. K. CHESTERTON'S NOVEL BY MRS. CECIL CHESTERTON AND RALPH NEALE.

EVERYMAN THEATRE

URGED by the minister to hear and believe, the dying blacksmith listened attentively to the miracles of Jonah and the whale, of the water turned into wine, and of the three who walked unharmed through the fiery furnace. But the last was something of which the blacksmith had knowledge, and, besides, he was a Lancashire man. "Dost tha mean to say as furnace wur seven times hotter than when Ah've done my firing up?" The minister made affirmation. "Then Ah'se believe no such tale," thundered the seeker after truth. "And what's more Ah'se not believe that bloomin' fish story noather!"

A faith exceeding the blacksmith's is essential to belief in the perfect inspiration of Mr. Chesterton's tall story. As this author can no more resist a paradox than the late H. J. Byron could resist a pun, and as *Thursday's* cannonade lasted three hours, some bracing of the

spirit was necessary to continue unwearied in the task of sifting the booming of heavy-metal idea from the popping of the corks of verbal ingenuity. It was good to see that Mrs. Cecil Chesterton and Mr. Ralph Neale, who are responsible for this excellent adaptation, had full courage of their author's loquacity ; and he would have been a great goose who had said Boh ! to them. Or even boo. For the evening was marked by considerable enthusiasm, not the least ecstatic person present being Mr. Chesterton himself. This was as it should be, our foremost wag being far too generous a spirit to sit " esurient at his own table," or, like the fine gentleman in Mandeville, to pretend to dazzle an audience with a display of wit " in which he himself sees nothing considerable."

But there is a time for the disinterested spectator to applaud, and a time for him to desist from applauding. Ourself, as Lamb would say, deemed the latter time reached when round about eleven o'clock aliens were defined as people who keep rabbits, and the woman who argued that she was a mother was told that it served her right. " My husband says . . . " she began in half-hearted retort, to which the god who kept hopping in and out of the machine replied, " He has no right to say anything ; he is not a mother." Here our attention definitely began to wander, doubtless in imitation of Mr. Chesterton's too digressive mentality.

That there is the soberest mind behind the most intoxicating of our author's matter is not to be denied, though possibly the inscrutability of some of his pro-

nouncements lies less in their density than in the denseness of those who scrutinise them. Indeed, one thinks that if one could pursue the Chestertonian mind into its last crannies one might discover what Space, Time, and Man is. For here we have an adventurous spirit who cannot cast the smallest pebble into the metaphysical pool without seeing waves of speculation lap the Infinite. I hope our author will forgive another story. There was once a centenarian who, asked how he spent his time, replied : "Sometimes I sits and thinks, and sometimes I just sits." Sometimes Mr. Chesterton stands on his head and thinks, and sometimes you might deem him content with just standing on his head. But you would be wrong. There is lunacy, and there is the moon-lit imagination which is only sanity writ larger.

And, of course, there are always those infernal paradoxes. The heathen philosopher signified by opening his lips that grapes were made to eat and mouths to open. Confront Mr. Chesterton with the humblest product of the garden, and he will open his mouth not to eat but to declaim. Wolf's bane and night-shade are Man's natural food ; sour grapes are the true Hippocrene ; the only forbidden fruit is your giant gooseberry, by partaking of whose fool Man does not become fool, though that fool may become Man. And so on and so forth. It is a wise writer who knows his literary parents, but one would say that Mr. Chesterton inherits his wisdom from Samuel Butler and his knack of making wisdom look like foolishness from

Mr. Shaw. Will anybody deny that the best things in this play are the silliest at first hearing? Or that the seven detectives masquerading as Anarchists, and desiring to take the life of their chief, bear a certain resemblance to the Polite Lunatic in that musical comedy of years ago who, knife in hand, used to swarm up bookshelves, saying, "Was you Mr. Bronson? Please excuse. I come to kill Mr. Bronson"? Yet that which the detectives detect in the end is the face of Nature masking the face of God, which leads them to perceive the hitherto unsuspected truth that the upholders of Law and Order need as much courage as any Anarchist.

Does all this make a good play? It does if you think so. In a foreword to the printed version Mr. Chesterton refuses to bore anybody about the meaning of his allegory, and he does well. At Hampstead you pay your five-and-ninepence, or whatever it is, and take your choice. You may complain that in the matter of the camouflaged policemen the gaff is blown too soon and that the succession of similar revelations grows tedious, or that people do not behave like this, or that you should not carry on lengthy conversations entirely by *non sequiturs*, or that some of the joking is not wittier than if a man, asked what he thought about St. Paul's Cathedral, should reply: "Sago Pudding." But equally you may take the contrary view and hold that the author's genius is a shining star reserved by Mr. Macdermott for his setting. But whichever opinion you hold you will not, I think, deny enjoyment

of an evening which contains so much pure fun. That the fun is often irrelevant is an objection of little account. There is immense joy to be found in digging for buried treasure whether the treasure exist or not ; and whoever spends an evening questing after Mr. Chesterton's meaning will at least obtain the secondary reward of finding his intellectual muscles a little stiff next morning, but tauter and fitter for the next job. One would insist that some of the wit when considered absolutely turns out to be first-class. In such a line as : " I can forgive him the neatness of his mind " one sees in a flash the whole doctrine which rejects ready-made opinion and insists that a man shall arrive at his own conclusions in his own way.

The piece is extremely well acted by a company whose names it is a pleasure to write down—Messieurs Douglas Burbidge, Campbell Gullan, Dan F. Roe, Earle Grey, Vincent Breit, Roy Byford, Guy le Feuvre, Stanley Lathbury, Roy Graham, Cecil Landeau, and Mesdames Josephine Wilson and Una O'Connor. The impressionist production was as stimulating as anything I have seen in a London theatre. Who would have thought that the feeling of a roysterer's tavern could be so perfectly rendered by three bits of painted cardboard and the device of two sailors sitting motionless nose to nose ?

January 24.

Morality Plays

"Wet Paint"

A Comedy by LORD LATHOM

Venturers' Society

THIS play is, in essence though quite unconsciously, Beaumont and Fletcher's *The Maid's Tragedy* all over again. Florence is Evadne, the lover is the King, and the husband fills Amintor's shoes quite perfectly. The scabrous familiar subject is treated, one epithet apart, with considerable tact and entire honesty. But the modern playwright is honest at his peril. The hullabaloo occasioned by this piece raises the whole question of "unpleasant" plays.

Surely principles are the thing to apply to dramas whose characters haven't any. First principles about any play may be boiled down to three questions. Is it true to life? Is it entertaining? Have we, apart from being entertained, undergone an emotional experience? Now let us see how *Wet Paint* comes through this three-fold test. There can be no doubt that the characters are accurately observed and faithfully reproduced; whoever should deny this must either be entirely ignorant of the half-world or go about it with his eyes wholly shut. Are we entertained by the play's heroine,

that single-minded, indefatigable courtesan born to luxury and riot? I suggest that we are.

The late William Archer, that sanest and healthiest of critics, laid it down formally that any play which comes successfully through the first two out of our three tests is a good play. Mark that he insisted upon the truth of the characters, and said nothing about their respectability. The third test, that of emotional experience, is called into operation only when we want to know whether a play, which we have already decided is a good play, may also be classified as great. The essential thing about a great play is that it shall make us think more finely about life, and so benefit us morally by the extent of our fine thinking. The process, you see, is a roundabout one. No less a person than Shelley pointed out long ago that the business of art is not to do good by direct moral precept, but to invigorate the imagination and trust the invigorated imagination to behave itself better in consequence. (Perhaps Shelley should have added the words "in the long run," for your newly invigorated imagination may set about its job of better behaviour in more or less rum fashion. Thus I knew a young man who had never tasted strong drink prior to a performance of *Tristan and Isolda*, which stirred his imagination so much that he drank a whole bottle of champagne and was put speechless to bed.) But the average man dislikes subtleties, be they Shelley's or another's, and will continue to use his own shorthand for the poet's dictum, telescoping it so that it reads: Art makes people better. Or he will put it

the other way round: That which fails to make people better cannot be Art. Whence: Plays about bad people cannot be good plays.

In *Wet Paint* there is no question of exalting vice. We have not for Florence anything like the same respect that we have for our charwoman, and hardly any liking. But since the stage presentation of the one profession is at least as lively as the other, we come back to truth as the essence of the matter. And before we insist that any modern playwright shall be untrue to life let us bethink ourselves of all the traps into which previous falsifiers have fallen. There is Dumas's sentimental trap, in which *demi-mondaines* contract fifth-act phthisis and expire on Louis Quinze sofas. There is the trap of masculine caddishness into which Augier, in *L'Aventurière*, fell headlong. There is the trap of improbability which ensnared Sir Arthur Pinero into making Paula Tanqueray commit suicide for the wrong reason. Our author, after successfully avoiding all pitfalls in the actual writing of this piece, has tumbled into one of maximum depth by claiming to have demonstrated the terrible fate reserved for the type of woman who is his central figure.

Permit me to suggest that his piece does not point out anything of the sort. As the curtain falls Florence is powdering her nose in preparation for Deauville, where she announces her intention of finding another lover, an intention in which we have not the least doubt that she will succeed as she always has succeeded. There is no hint that the career of what used to be

called a "dashing Cyprian" has brought her either unhappiness or compunction. On the contrary, it is being a Cyprian which has enabled her to cut a dash. As a moral, wage-earning young woman she must have bored herself to death transcribing "Yours of 3rd inst. to hand." Now, if the author is to strike terror into the heart of any budding Florence he must show his heroine destitute, pawning her brooch for a night's lodging, or hesitating between Waterloo Road and Waterloo Bridge. But we do not feel that this must inevitably be the end of Florence; we feel, on the contrary, that this is just what will not happen to her. To have shown it would have meant an untrue play. That great master-realist, Balzac, had all the difficulty in the world to persuade Nemesis to overtake Valérie Marneffe, who was his Florence; and the huge improbability of that final catastrophe is the one blot on a great book. *Wet Paint* is not a great play, but, though a little one, it does not deviate from truth. And I suggest that truth is the thing to be insisted upon here, and that we should conveniently take a tip from Lady Teazle and leave morality out of the argument.

Should plays which by reason of their subject cannot be made to wind up with an edifying moral be performed on our stage? Well, one would hazard the view that it is not the business of the dramatist to write with an eye to the Young Person and to nobody else. The theatre is not a Sunday School, and some playgoers are grown up. If this piece is a-moral it is because life is often a-moral. I have said that we have

little respect for Florence. But this, at least, is her due —that she deceives neither herself nor us. She is what she pretends to be, and she pretends to be what she is. Such respect as we have is reserved for that quality in her which Claude Vignon admired in Mme. Marneffe—the quality of "intelligent depravity." This being said, let us have as few plays as may be about Florence and her kind. The small coterie of which she is the centre has of late played a part in the English theatre out of all proportion to its significance in English life. Such people exist, but they are not many. Plays concerning them may possess truth and interest, but so do police court reports. There is nothing in the drama of morbidity to stir the mind to sympathy or any other generous mood. A tumour may be a thing of beauty to the surgeon and also to the artist who thinks with Baudelaire and Huysmans. But to the plain man it must always be an offence. The coterie described in this play is a tumour in the body politic, and we have not always appetite for the operating-table. Florence herself is a *fleur du mal*. Therefore, though this play is intellectually unassailable, one feels that it belongs to a type which a healthy theatre will want to throw off. Poison, though a good medicine upon occasion, is a poor diet. I think Lord Lathom has permitted himself one or two avoidable outspokennesses. He makes too much play with that word which was the real occasion of Laetetia Snap's visit to Jonathan Wild on the night before his execution. Miss Tishy called, it will be remembered,

not so much to take a sorrowing farewell of her amiable spouse as to ask why he had so often flung at her that most opprobrious of epithets. "Why b——, Mr. Wild, why b——?" Possibly greater practice would have enabled Lord Lathom to convey the same effect upon the mind without so violently distressing the ear. But this little objection apart, the dialogue seems to me to be entirely good and such as the people might actually use. The piece was brilliantly acted, the performances of Miss Iris Hoey and Mr. Nigel Bruce being particularly admirable.

February 28.

"The Way You Look At It"

A Play by LORD LATHOM

Queen's Theatre

WHAT reason shall we assign for the frigidity of the stalls towards this play, and the resentment of the gallery? First and second acts had done very well; it was the third which fell flat, that is, if you can associate flatness with disapproval rising to hostility. The reason, I suggest, is not far to seek. It is that the author, having bared a back for the whip, proceeded to ask the house to denude its own bosom and take to it sympathetically a creature whom it felt to be essentially ignoble. Probably there is no individual living however base or degraded for whom, given knowledge of all the circumstances including heredity and environment, a case could not be made out. But the hero of a play has more general significance than the hero of a newspaper report. A wretch on trial in the dock is a strictly individual case; the same man on the stage stands for more persons than himself.

The hero of Lord Lathom's play stands for all

the young men who allow themselves to be kept by women. Now I am not going to take the view that a case could not by any possibility be made out for Bobby Rendon. There may be the excuse of passion ; there is the point of view of the witty Frenchman who, under reproach, complained of the fuss made over a few miserable cutlets ; there are the Freudian contingencies ; there is the theory that the levelling-up of the sexes has made this matter of " protection " the same for one as the other ; there is the view that the relationship is no worse than marrying for money. I am not going to deny any of these ways of looking at particular cases, but I am going to say that on the stage we must take the more general view, and that the world looks upon the Bobby Rendons with abhorrence. The world is right. In so far as Lord Lathom's piece invites us to sympathise with all young men who prefer luxury and degradation to an office stool and self-respect, it calls for censure. " I'm shocked ; at least, I hope I'm shocked," says a character about a picture in Bobby's flat. And though lip-service is paid to the odium of Bobby's career, we feel that the call upon our distaste is perfunctory.

I shall be told that the dramatist has nothing to do with morality and is entitled to draw life as he sees it. To which my answer is that if the author had given us the whole truth about Bobby; all my objections would have fallen to the ground. But he has done nothing of the sort. He has drawn an unpleasant character, coated it with a thin veneer of repentance and reformation,

and asked for our commiseration when the poor fellow's virtuous scheme goes agley. But let us suppose that Bobby had made sure of Joan before he threw off Mrs. Risley, and that Joan had been a less wide-awake young woman with some illusions left about love in a cottage. Does our author believe that the spoiled and petted young man of the first two acts is going to grow sufficient backbone and moral fibre during the first few months of his new passion to chain him to his office stool and four pounds a week after that passion has worn off? Isn't it obvious that as Joan gets older he will love her less and hate himself more for his lapse into respectability? Don't we know that his comparisons between the Tooting Paleodrome, second house, Saturday night, and the Casino at Deauville will not be to the advantage of the former, that he will be debt-ridden and bored, and that, finally, he will either make Joan's life and his own life a hell, or leave Joan and go back to Mrs. Risley, or if not Mrs. Risley then another?

The pretence that Bobby is a weak-minded young fellow and nobody's enemy but his own simply won't wash; people who go about the world with their eyes open know perfectly well that young men of Bobby's sort are extremely intelligent, and that sentiment and remorse play no part in their careers. If this piece is only the tale of a good young man's clumsiness in retrieving a slip it means nothing, and is not worth while. But a third act such as I have indicated would have told the truth, and it would also have been moral.

Morality does not consist in showing virtue triumphant and vice coming to a bad end. That is not the way of the world. The head of Bobby's clan is Bel Ami, and the morality of Maupassant's story consists in our despising the fellow in spite of his success. Lord Lathom should have had the courage of his hero, and asked for our contempt. There were two factors, I suggest, in the disappointment of the audience—one simple and the other instructed. The simple part of the disappointment was due to the unwillingness of generous souls to believe that known causes have known effects. The sentimental will not have it that a young man with good manners and nice hair can be anything but a really decent fellow at heart, or that the roses in a fresh young girl's cheek are incompetent to wipe a debauchee's slate clean for the rest of his regulated existence. But the more reasoned part of the audience's hostility was due, I am persuaded, to a definitely increasing distaste for exhibitions of expensive vice. Our betters have plenty of money, and we are beginning to feel that they should do their washing in private.

For once in a way it seemed to me that Miss Isabel Jeans was miscast. This actress has extraordinary talent for suggesting the jimp, modish, and brittle. But self-sufficient porcelain was not what was wanted for Mrs. Risley. Miss Jeans did not attempt to portray the vulgar woman who will *afficher* herself over half Europe, nor did she suggest a fine creature unhappily married and making another mistake. On the other hand, Miss Edna Best's Joan was a beautiful per-

formance, perfectly right down to the smallest intonation. Mr. Leslie Howard achieved the very considerable feat of making the audience like the actor whilst loathing the character. Miss Martita Hunt and Mr. Tom Nesbitt portrayed the respectable side of life respectably.

August 1.

"Easy Virtue"

A Play by NOEL COWARD

Duke of York's Theatre

THE higher the brow the narrower the mind. That is if one is a fashionable young playwright familiar with the tawdry round of the Riviera and unable to conceive a world elsewhere. Give your æsthete a horse he can't ride and farewell Leicestershire! We all remember the playwright's definition of the hunting squire as "the unspeakable in pursuit of the uneatable." But might not the modern vixen be described with equal justice as the uneatable in pursuit of the unspeakable? Is not the exotic young woman who on a fine summer morning mews herself up with Proust's novel of the unmentionable title just as ridiculous as the cross-country gentleman who should talk horse at the Russian Ballet? At the most the *plage* at Deauville and the Casino at "Monte" do not exceed half the world. The Cotswolds and the Mendips exist, and not to know what to make of them is to be as unsmart as to turn up at Ascot in knickerbockers.

Mr. Noel Coward gets younger with every play, and in *Easy Virtue* has attained to that pure idealism

which prompts the schoolboy who has been taken to see *La Dame aux Camélias* to believe for the next ten years that a *cocotte* is the noblest work of man if not of God. Larita, his heroine, " lives emotionally," which means that for such hours as the sun shines she is a bore to herself and a nuisance to everybody else. John Whittaker, his hero, is, to borrow from another of this author's plays, a " hearty young thing in flannels." To play cricket for your school or University is to earn the contempt of Mr. Coward's modish world ; that folly goes unchastened which marries an adventuress out of hand without inquiring as to the number of previous husbands or means of existence between marriages. Sir Arthur Pinero made you feel that Aubrey Tanqueray's mistake was not so much in marrying Paula as in condemning her to live forty miles out of London. It was the woman who was " wrong " and not the country, whereas Mr. Coward would have it the other way about.

At first it looked as though our youngest playwright was going to write his best play. John's family was well drawn. The mother was a little narrowminded, perhaps, a little intolerant of lapses from virtue on the part of servant-girls, and not unnaturally prejudiced against daughters-in-law arriving without credentials from nowhere in particular. Yet Mrs. Whittaker was recognisably a woman of breeding, bred in this country and no other. The father was English also—English as Mr. Bennett, tolerant to the point of laxity, yet, unlike Jane Austen's paterfamilias, something inclined to be put

upon. The sisters, too, were well done—the strong-minded elder, keen upon social service with opinions cropped as her hair, and the boisterous younger, a healthy pickle. The stir antecedent to the arrival of the unhappy pair, the embarrassed welcome, the lady's corona of unsuitability, the ease with which she cottoned to some stray detrimental—all these things suggested that Mr. Coward was going to see both sides of his case.

Unfortunately, as soon as the play began to move it went to pieces. Larita remained true to type. She was as bored as a town-mouse who goes to stay with a country cousin, and behaved after the normal fashion of little ladies who are not amused. It was the family which became improbable. The elder sister accused Larita of trying to seduce her father ; the younger hunted up old newspaper files till she found the record of Larita's past, which she promptly produced at the tea-table ; the mother ordered her daughter-in-law to her bedroom. One didn't believe that these things could happen. But the theatre is the theatre, and Larita's natural indignation and the means she took to pay off these new and unheard-of scores raised the natural Adam in every spectator. The offended lady, bedizened to outvie the Queen of Sheba, descending from her imprisonment first to stagger a county with a greater show of jewels than comports with married life and then to rout it with a courtesan's insolence, aroused sympathy and the fighting instinct in every member of the audience. The two scenes of gathering exasperation and subsequent explosion had been very well con-

trived, and in Larita we recognised a first-class disciple of that school which enjoins that at least half a dozen perfectly explicit Rolands shall be returned for every half-hinted Oliver.

The piece might be called a *crescendo* in insolence. One does not think that even in the most favourable circumstances Larita could ever have been a permanent success in the Whittaker household, all of which received her with arms formally opened only to press her to bosoms frigid when they were not positively spikey. The female Whittakers were of that charitable sort which finds it safest to believe the worst beforehand, and would really be rather disappointed if it didn't happen. We may almost say that the Whittaker females "asked for it." They certainly got it. They began to get it when they asked Larita seven times in one morning why she did not go out on the lawn and watch the tennis. Larita couldn't suffer fools even when for the moment they were not bent on mischief. Mrs. Whittaker complains that half the things ordered for the ball from Fortnum and Mason haven't come. "Have you telephoned?" Larita asks. "Yes," replies Mrs. Whittaker. "What did they say?" Larita pursues. "They said they were sending them." "Then that's settled," says Larita returning to that novel which Proust, with one eye on the discomfiture of the English county, called *Sodom and Gomorrah.* The piece excited even to the point of making us believe that by taking her hook for Paris and the sunnier and more expensive Continental spas Larita showed

herself a more admirable creature than the average young Englishwoman who on a wet day puts on thick boots and a mackintosh and tramps the country lanes. It was not till we got home that we reflected that a light and wandering lady is, God help us, a thing of naught.

Miss Jane Cowl received a tremendous ovation after the second act and again at the end of the play. It is a foolish thing to declare any actress first-class on the strength of a single part or performance. But if Miss Cowl can play anything else—and her Juliet has won renown—then she is a very fine artist indeed. She has no devastating prettiness; her features are a battle-ground for the emotions rather than a lawn for garden-party simpering. She has, as Byron puts it, "a velvet brow, with two pitch-balls stuck in her face for eyes," and her countenance not only betrays past storms, but foretells those to come. This actress has poise, and pace, and she delivers the second-act tirade as such things ought to be delivered, while her sullens at the end are magnificent. Miss Cowl acts with her whole body, and her gestures are expressive enough to convey meaning to anybody who should know no English. She has that style which is almost a physical quality, understanding, and temperament. Finally, she possesses what the French call "le *la* du rôle." Miss Mabel Terry-Lewis played the English châtelaine with as much delicacy and discrimination as her author would permit, and perhaps only those who remembered Miss Marda Vanne as the ineffectual wife of the missionary

in *Rain* realised how much acting was contained in her firm portrait of the cropped zealot. As to this character, I must be permitted another word. "There are moments, are there not, when one doesn't think of girls?" Mr. Beerbohm made Mr. George Moore say in his pastiche. But there are no moments, apparently, in which Mr. Coward, the playwright, refrains from thinking in terms of sex, and to attribute Marion's proselytism to repressed desires seems to me to be just nonsense. Larita's taunts about concealed pruriency should be deleted, the implication being that they are true and not charges made by a woman in a temper. Mr. Marcus Barron's Whittaker *père* was particularly good. And now, please, may we see Miss Cowl in something else?

June 13.

"Scotch Mist"

A Play by PATRICK HASTINGS

St. Martin's Theatre

HERE is another play about one of those ultra-modern stage-heroines who do not appear to be ashamed of what they are, but would probably resent open mention of the category to which their acts assign them. One finds it as difficult to accept them as to believe that two and two make five. If Miss Mary Denvers had always been as immaculate as she ultimately pretended to her Scotch lover, why did she proclaim herself at the beginning of the play to be morally as spotted as the leopard? There are those who claim that they can believe as many as six impossible things before breakfast, but it would have needed a very good dinner and a virtuoso in credulity to believe all the things that happened in this play, the hero of which achieved the apparently impossible feat of over-topping the heroine in incomprehensibility. David Campbell had run away from Mary's wiles some years previously, and it was all the way to Africa that he had run. Yet he must needs ask Mary's husband to spend a holiday with him at Kinlochie, and then

extend the invitation to the young woman whom he has spent half his life in avoiding. It was true that it was really she who invited herself, but David's refusal was altogether too half-hearted. Arrived at Kinlochie, David formally explained to Mary that the one thing which the Campbell code forbade was to betray a friend's wife, after which the dour fellow, having vowed for an hour that he would ne'er consent, consented in ten minutes. The lady protested that she was not that sort, and never had been. Whereupon David overturned the lamp, and the curtain fell with pudic rapidity. One thought that the lady protested too much at receipt of the passionate reward for which her soul had declared itself so explicitly to hanker. However that may be, one could feel neither liking nor respect for Mary Denvers, though the acting of charming Miss Tallulah Bankhead didn't make it too easy to preserve this view in sternest integrity. Still, one insists that in real life the Mary Denvers must be difficult to like and impossible to respect. They are honest neither with themselves nor with us, and do not seem to have made up their own minds as to what it is they really do want, whereas Delilah and Jezebel knew very exactly.

The play is written with a *naivete* in technique which either pleases or displeases according as to how little or how much you care whether a playwright knows his business. The scene in which the lover made one pretended exit after another, as though he were out to prove all over again De Musset's proverb about doors

being either open or shut, provoked the pit to giggles. The character on which the chief burden of the play's action fell was a secondary lover, whose business it was to be at hand to push the characters in and out of the right emergencies, and at the same time to provide comic relief. (One agrees that there may be people who find entertainment in confounding Messalina with Mussolini.) The dialogue was stilted and improbable throughout. Take the moment when Mary turns to her husband and says that she is going away. Now the natural form of the husband's first question would be : " Who, or which of them, are you going away with ? " But Sir Patrick Hastings makes him say : " Have you definitely selected your companion ? " The difference between good and bad dialogue may be illustrated here.

In Mr. Openshaw's comedy, *All the King's Horses*, the husband turns to his wife after her terrific tirade and says : " If you felt like that why didn't you mention it before ? " " Mention it" she retorts, " you don't *mention* a thing like that ! " thus conveying her irritation at the use of so inadequate a word. But that the author of *Scotch Mist* can have no inkling of inadequacy is shown when the husband determines to force from his wife, who is in the next room, a decision which is to affect the lives of three people. He goes to the door and says : " Mary, can you give us a minute ? " The audience showed by a laugh its quick recognition of absurdity. Nor, one thinks, is the author on much safer ground when he is conscious that he must be adequate. When David finally enfolds his little baggage

in his arms, he promises her a time " when the wind shall blow out of heaven, the sun shall shine, and God shall laugh simply because you smile." The curtain coming down upon this sally, the roar which greeted it was fortunately lost in the roar of applause accorded to favourite players.

If this piece had been written in Latin every question addressed to Mr. Tearle—and there were many —would have begun with the word which foreshadows the answer, " No." Mr. Tearle went on saying he wouldn't in right manly fashion, and then did in right cave-manly fashion. If this very fine actor wants to do rough stuff which is really rough, why does he not persuade some Sunday Society to let him act in O'Neill's *The Hairy Ape ?* Those skilful players, Messrs. Robert Horton and Edmond Breon, did wonders with two of the worst parts ever devised, and Miss Tallulah Bankhead green-hatted it to perfection.

January 31.

"The Lash"

A Play by CYRIL CAMPION

Royalty Theatre

HERE is something which we may safely pronounce to be a good play provided we are careful about the plane to which it is assigned. Considered æsthetically or absolutely, outside the theatre, it may not exist; but we are in the theatre, where problems may be interesting without being fully propounded and solutions satisfactory without being sound. The questions which this play asks us to decide are whether a spoiled child should be spared the rod, and whether a belated application is better than none at all. There are doubtless some who will hold that to witness a father thrashing his grown-up son is to be present at an expense of spirit in a waste of shame. The curious point about this piece is that the only ineffective moment was its culmination. The theme was well stated, the working out was the reverse of boring, but the recapitulation turned out to be of the nature of an anti-climax. One could not help wondering whether the shoulders of the young gentleman were sufficiently padded to stand the prolonged assault, and also

how the thickness and number of the layers had been arrived at.

Bronson Haughton was one of those strong, loquacious men who make fortunes in the Australian Bush by means of sheep-shearing, gold digging, kangaroo-breeding, or other sports. He could not see that in his own person he had used up sufficient manliness to go round at least three generations, and was astonished that when he mentioned the Bush to his son that young gentleman did not immediately jump for joy and shout " Coo-ee," or whatever it is that bushmen use. Arthur Haughton, after he had been sent down from Oxford, had got into one of those fast sets for particulars of which the reader must refer to the plays of Mr. Noel Coward. Although in reptilian coils of choice and pointed horror, the boy did what one would have thought his father might have recognised as a typically normal thing. He married the shorthand-typist at the office at which he was supposed to work, and then, under pretence of staying at the reptile's flat, kept house and home with his little lady. But it really was disgraceful of Arthur to neglect his charming wife—for very charming she turned out to be on her appearance at Arthur's home—and neglect her almost to the point of desertion. It was still more disgraceful of him to carry on with a Colonel's lady when the Colonel was in a nursing home and after he, Arthur, had been sent to Australia. But that there was some virility in the boy which made him worth saving was proved by the fact that in addition to his manly scrapes he had at Teneriffe cut away from his

floating prison. He was at least sport enough to give the captain the slip.

All this time the play has been working up steadily to the great scene, and Haughton *père* has already purged his bosom of three or four apprehensive soliloquies beginning :—

> Is this a horse-whip which I see before me,
> The handle toward my hand ? Come, let me clutch thee.
> If it were done when 'tis done, then t'were well
> It were done quickly. What man dare I dare,
> If trembling I delay, then protest me
> The father of a girl.

So, giving thanks that his son is a manly little sportsman who only needs a little coaching to set out again for Australia as a representative of England's best, Bronson Haughton proceeds to execution. The application of the rope fails, for the reason, I suggest, that we are allowed to behold it. It would probably succeed if the curtain had the wit to intervene. One remembers that one's father and headmaster were always particularly careful to close the door. Nevertheless, the play is interesting, largely because, although one does not believe in what the father and son do, one is quite convinced about the actuality of all that they say. Which, in the theatre, produces a much greater effect of reality than when people do the expected and natural things and talk preposterously about them.

The part of the son was admirably played by Mr. Denys Blakelock, who succeeded in showing something likeable underneath the outer covering of hysteria. In

addition to this Mr. Blakelock gave us a performance of considerable technical accomplishment. Was it a trifle ungenerous on the part of the management not to give him a separate curtain at the end of the piece, and a little stupid of the audience not to insist upon it? General appreciation centred in the efforts of Mr. Alfred Drayton as the upholder of the domestic virtues. Mr. Drayton did, indeed, give an excellent performance, as full of tact and discretion as it was of strength. But there can be little doubt that it came easily to him, and was indeed inherent in his personality. One felt that this actor of authority and experience would have had to try very hard not to succeed, whereas the less congenial part of the son called for sustained effort and a persistent brilliancy of execution. I do not want in any way to compare the merits of the two players, and will even insist that Mr. Drayton's performance could not have been better. It is only fair, however, to suggest that Mr. Blakelock was called upon to do a more difficult thing, and to say that in my opinion the first-night audience hardly recognised this fact.

Miss Marjorie Mars, a newcomer, acted very agreeably as the little typist, Mr. David Hutcheson was quite fearsomely reptilian, and Mr. Lionel Gadsden suggested unexpected possibilities of entertainment in the Australian bush. Miss Dorie Sawyer as the vamp was funny without being vulgar, and Mr. Vincent Sternroyd as the irate Colonel, who apparently found a loaded revolver lying about his nursing home, missed cleverly according to plan. *The Lash* would be a very

good stage-play if that instrument were seen in the upswing only. "Slow back" is the word here; the curtain should do the rest.

October 31.

"Down Hill"

A Play by DAVID L'ESTRANGE

Queen's Theatre

THE scent of good honest soap crosses the footlights as Roddy Berwick, footballer, washes his feet after the scrum. To old-fashioned taste these ablutions may seem a little unnecessary and even repugnant. Modern sensibility, however, is all for the intimacies, and a crowded house delightedly watched Mr. Novello as he laved and frictioned each little ivory pig on its way to market. But this was the only soaping our hero was to get, the ensuing play being all about the morally unwashed.

If a man must be either among those who sin or are sinned against he had better belong to the first class rather than to the second, said Samuel Butler. Roddy Berwick in the beginning failed signally to regard this most politic dictum. He took on his own shoulders the sin of paternity which rightly belong to his chum, was expelled, and could not see that it was hard on his father to have to pay the affiliation fees resulting from his quixotism. There was a good scene in the doctor's study—one thought Dr. Blimber had been the

last to wear the title—and the family row which followed was first class. But for the necessity of continuing the play the authors looked like seizing a fine chance here. The boy was so exasperated by his father's persistent brutality that he made a clean breast of his chivalry, and when his father refused to believe him prepared to leave the house, whereupon a telegram opportunely arrived confirming his story. In real life the father would have made some hectoring apology, and the boy, being vindicated, would have crumpled up. And the scene disappointed just because for a few moments it had brought us into touch with real life. But plays, having once been started, must go on.

So Roddy shook the dust of Acacia Villa's carpets from his feet and became a chorus-boy at the Casino Theatre, where we were introduced to a heroine of musical comedy in her private capacity as a breaker of hearts, with whom Roddy exchanged sentimentalities alternately violent and sickly. But Julia held that her duty to herself demanded sale to the highest bidder, and so insisted upon Roddy being dismissed from the theatre. Had she then no Willy or other French novelist to tell her about "*le singe*" and "*le gigolo*"? Frankly, one did not believe Julia when she began to lecture Roddy on the chorus-boy's future, and warn him of the time when, with cheeks raddled and ruddled, he would become a wreck, a candle that gutters, and all those things to which Paula Tanqueray looked forward. This part of the play was frankly mawkish.

I do not propose to follow our rake's progress in too

much detail. He won a prize in the Calcutta Sweep which he squandered on Julia, supper parties, and dud mining shares. He next became a dancing partner in Paris, where a young American lady offered him 2,000 francs to enable him to take lessons on the piano. Roddy spent this sum in cocaine. He was next found living with a half-caste girl in Marseilles, having had his head cut open in a street brawl and being rendered thereby dumb and almost entirely *gaga*. But the half-caste had a good heart, and gave an opportune Swedish skipper three pounds to take Roddy to England. Arrived in London, that hero prepared to take from the Embankment that dive into the waters of oblivion for which travel on a tramp steamer apparently denies opportunities. But his coat-tails were timely clutched by a passing young man, who cried, " Don't do that, Roddy. Remember your old school ! " or words to that effect. The school chum told Roddy that his, Roddy's, father had died, leaving him a fortune. Would Roddy go with him to Vancouver and give the young idea of Columbia lessons in shooting ? Roddy would.

Now, if you are going to ask me to put my hand on my heart and declare this to be a good play, I am afraid I cannot oblige. Miss Constance Collier and Mr. Novello, who are " David L'Estrange," are far too clever not to know that it is the purest tosh put together for the purpose of exploiting Mr. Novello's personal attractions. This actor looks as pretty as before, wears his clothes nicely, carries off everything with an air, and there is really no more to be said. I liked very

much a tiny performance by Mr. Glen Byam Shaw, and Miss Phyllis Monkman gave an imitation of a vulgar musical comedy lady which those acquainted with that world assured me to be quite incredibly veracious.

June 20.

Modern Plays

"The Would-be Gentleman"

ADAPTED FROM "LE BOURGEOIS GENTILHOMME" OF MOLIÈRE BY F. ANSTEY

LYRIC THEATRE, HAMMERSMITH

A GREAT dramatic critic of the 'nineties defined character acting as "an elaborate study of the disguises and stage tricks by which acting can be grotesquely simulated." At once terrific avenues of speculation are opened. Were Tree, Hare, and little Robson actors or merely grotesque simulators of acting? What the critic meant, of course, is that acting must come from within as well as from without, and that for every ounce of make-up and wiggery there must be a corresponding exudation of the actor's spirit. In other words the player must be as well as look. But what about the artists who pretend to be the part without looking it? What about Duse's Marguerite Gautier, whose aspect, according to Lemaître, was that of a "grisette extrêmement distinguée et un peu préraphaélite, une grisette de Botticelli"? Was this acting, or merely a sublime simulation of it? Probably one should differentiate

between romantic and comic playing. The great romantic actor makes it feasible that the Moor, the Dane and the mad English king should look like him, speak with his voice and burn up their passions in his own romantic flame. Whereas comic acting is essentially two-sided. The character actor must be doubled by the comedian, who in each new part springs upon the stage a newborn actor with new-made features, voice, habit, gait, manner, yet giving you to think that he has owned them always. Coquelin was such an actor. He would play Cyrano in the afternoon with a *panache* which even his creator hardly glimpsed. Then in the evening he would appear as M. Jourdain with all his swell of soul gone, his mind beclouded, his faculties diminished, his whole being reduced to a state of foggy apprehension and gaping wonder. The absurdities of Molière's comic creation were transmuted into the elemental childishness of Man by the sheer relish and joy which the actor had in them. Coquelin owed his supremacy to three things : the perfect plasticity of the mask moulded to fit the informing soul, the modulations of voice and mastery over rhetoric, and last his gusto.

Of these faculties Mr. Playfair possesses the third in plenty. But I cannot think that he has the first, and I do not know whether he has attempted the second. It was said of Munden, and might have been said of Coquelin, that he had no face which you could properly pin down and call his. There is one face, said Lamb, of Farley, one face of Knight, one (but what a

one it is !) of Liston. Similarly there is one face of Playfair, and what a face it is to express all that perky self-assurance which is not in M. Jourdain ! The good fellow should radiate a heaven-sent stupidity lit up with the childish sense of the world as Christmas-tree. He is not going to show the world ; the world is being shown to him. When Coquelin played Jourdain his gestures were laboured, his voice was sleepy, his face moon-like, his nose squatting upon it as though already flattened by the buffets of ridicule. Now Mr. Playfair's gestures are quick and spry, his voice is alert, and his whole countenance perceptive. This Jourdain has obviously more brains than anybody on the stage except Baptiste the lackey, and intelligence dogs him whether Mr. Playfair will or no. Yet in its way the performance is exceedingly amusing. The actor keeps his version of the character very much alive, fills the eye and stage, and in his wonderful costumes gratifies our sense of the grotesque. Pathos was never very far from Coquelin's bourgeois, and Mr. Playfair achieves it once during the meal of which he may not partake. He also gives the piece a unity which, under Coquelin, it could never have. For in the Frenchman's case the slow-witted creature was a person of some dignity to whom the Turkish Ceremony was an offence ; Mr. Playfair makes the scene a culmination. Auger in his foot-notes marks the entrance of the disguised Covielle. " Here the comedy ends and the farce begins." But at Hammersmith there is no dividing line ; the play had been farce from the start.

Though the piece is not the Molière of the purist, it is a rattling good entertainment which goes with a swing from start to finish. The theatre is not Richelieu's nor the date 1670, but we need not grieve overmuch. There were some capital performances. Mr. Miles Malleson captured the mood perfectly both as the Dancing Master and the Mufti, and was well seconded by Mr. Edmond Kapp as the Music Master, Mr. Richard Goolden as the Professor of Philosophy, and Mr. George Bishop as Covielle. Mr. William Stack, as Dorante, made a shot at the grand manner which, if it was not a bull's eye, was at least on the target; Miss Violet Graham contrived to make a dainty skiff of that stately barque, the Marquise; and Mr. James Whale presented a masterful and "intriguing" major-domo. The setting and costumes, by Mr. Norman Wilkinson, were a constant piquancy and delight, and Mr. Playfair's ornamentation of the piece was sufficient and tasteful. This producer has sometimes been accused of over-elaborating his revivals. In view of Molière's plentiful directions as to ballets of scullions, tailors, and others, he would be well justified in expressing himself for the nonce amazed at his own moderation. Students of Molière may think that in the original the dialogue has a quality lost in crossing the Channel. But, on the whole, Mr. Anstey has done his work very well.

November 21.

"Distinguished Villa"

A Play by KATE O'BRIEN

Little Theatre

WILLIAM COBBETT, discussing sham gentility, has a fine passage about the passing of old farmhouses and the substitution of gimcrack edifices, a mistress "stuck-up in a place she calls a *parlour*; some showy chairs and a sofa (a *sofa* by all means); the house too neat for a dirty-shoed carter to be allowed to come into; and everything proclaiming a constant anxiety to make a show not warranted by the reality." The sons, if any, are not to go to the plough. They are to become young gentlemen, clerks, "or some skimmy-dish thing or other."

This tirade aptly describes the Hemworth household, except that it was urban instead of rural, and there was never question of a family. Mabel Hemworth laid claim to bad health, and was supported by Doctor Broad very much as Mrs. Wititterly was backed by Sir Tumley Snuffim. So poor Natty Hemworth—"Natty" because he possessed a certain taste in neck wear and other fripperies—had to accept in the place of wifely affection lace curtains, plaques, and three china

swans squatting on a pool of glass in the middle of the dining-room table. But the real beginning of Natty's tragedy was the arrival of a lodger, one Frances Llewellyn, a library assistant with a taste for Mozart. A wealthy young man, one Alec Webberley, though courting the very "superior" Frances, was not blind to Mabel's pretty sister. Now Gwendoline already had her John, a young man who was all fire and air and as passionately attached to the Sunday morning worship of Nature as Frances was devoted to gramophone records of *Voi che sapete* and the like. So John, weary of Gwendoline's taste in cinema stars, changed over to Frances, both of them agreeing that love such as theirs put them beyond the pale of ill-luck. But they were reckoning without Gwendoline, who, thrown over by Alec, was forced to declare John to be the father of her baby. Whereupon John said goodbye to Frances and embraced wretchedness.

It was the presence of Frances which aroused Natty to a sense of his loneliness and disillusion. "What is it," he asked, "which makes life worth living for us clerks?" Whereupon Frances paraphrased Burns on the "true pathos and sublime of human life," and Natty realised that the Mabels and happiness do not go together. After which he found himself at Rotherhithe with a little drab who spoke him comfortable words. Natty made confession next morning, and realising that henceforth his life with Mabel would be an active hell instead of a passive one, cut his throat over the kitchen sink.

Is this piece true to life ? It is certainly untrue in one or two minor ways. The souls of John and Frances shine something too obviously ; their talk is too tall, and their love-making too literary. No Brixton young woman was ever woo'd after John's humour. Is Natty's class bored with Brixton ? One suggests not. Miss O'Brien has forgotten, or perhaps never realised, those games of nap and solo whist played on newspapers spread in the train, the Saturday afternoons at Highbury or the Oval, coupons, shilling doubles, games of darts in bar parlours, motor bikes, " pictures," second houses. Is the city clerk bored with the city ? Again one must think not. If a man spends his life addressing envelopes it is because he has not got a mind to, or for, anything else. If a city clerk is bored with his job he will be urged to something better ; conversely if he have not that urge he will not be bored. Discontent, without other capacity, is not to be encouraged, even by sentimental playwrights.

It seems to me, though I am enormously diffident about this, that the author has credited Natty with the feelings which she would have in his place. The beauty of the sunset, and the hideousness of the Hemworth furniture hurt Miss O'Brien. But is Natty a young Idas that he should be " wounded with beauty in the summer night ? " Or a fervent of the Russian ballet that he should deplore those unexceptionable swans ? I feel that the people in this play are true less to themselves than to the idea which Miss O'Brien makes of them. Natty's end is too explicit,

and too much attended with enlightenment. I see him in reality going on the spree again, concocting more or less successful stories about being kept late at the office, taking irresolutely to drink and yet more drink, and, finally, sitting in the dock on the capital charge, dazed, and not quite knowing how it has all come about. Men have died, said Rosalind, but not for love. Nor yet for the lack of it, one thinks. To be unloved of Mabel Hemworth will seem to many to be the sum of human felicity, and though Natty is not of their number I cannot quite believe in either his apostrophe to the sunset or his suicide. The one entirely credible thing about him is the orgy which he cannot explain to himself, to Mabel, or to us. His tragedy, if tragedy must come, will be inarticulate.

Be it said that these objections are post-performance. In the theatre the play is admirable, highly entertaining, and at times very moving. Clever Miss Una O'Connor combines with Miss O'Brien to make their Gorgon a thing of utmost horror. Miss O'Connor is an actress of great accomplishment. We believe her to be Irish and know her pathos. Now comes this magnificent grotesque with its basis of truth, savage irony, superb fun, and wonderful sense for Cockney character and accent. I did not see Mr. Eliot Makeham's original Natty, and find it hard to believe that anybody could be better than Mr. Ivor Barnard, who kept as close to his class and mentality as his author would let him. And within those limits he gave a very sensitive performance. As the two "skimmy-dish"

angels of sweetness and light Mr. William Stack and Miss Clare Harris submitted loyal expositions of moral up-lift. But were not the frocks worn by Frances a shade too smart ? Miss Gillian Lind gave sympathetic exhibition of popular distress, and Mr. Henry Hoare was as plausible a philanderer as ever crossed Vauxhall Bridge.

July 18.

"The Queen Was In The Parlour"

A Romance by NOEL COWARD

St. Martin's Theatre

AS long as I live, and as long as Mr. Coward keeps on writing plays, I shall believe his gammoning of that very fine critic, Mr. Desmond McCarthy, to be his topmost achievement. While protesting that he is not going to drag Mr. Coward's *The Queen was in the Parlour* up to the highest court——"that would be silly"—Mr. McCarthy at once proceeds to do so by showing how it fails to achieve the "emotional rhythm" of Tchehov and Shakespeare. He tells us that the plays of the great dramatists, besides having a surface interest or story which keeps the audience in suspense and satisfies expectations, also arouse emotions making "a kind of chord or harmony which satisfies us, as the working out of the idea or of the intrigue may satisfy our minds." The distinguished critic of *The New Statesman* sees in the last two acts of this Ruritanian comedy—or are we supposed to call it a tragedy?—a highly romantic exposition of the sense of public duty in modern royalties, and

a highly impressive comparison of the quality of two human relations, passion and fellow-service. Where, we are asked, is the failure of rhythm in this piece? And we are to find the answer in the first act, the picture of the lovers' happiness being "too trivial to balance Acts II and III." I submit that it is the last two-thirds of the play which have gammoned Mr. McCarthy. My own impression of this piece is that the only part of it which is true and sincere or has any relation to life is that which is concerned with trivialities. The rhythmic emotion upon which so much stress has been laid seems to me to be the purest bunkum, admirably effective in the theatre, of course, but bunkum of the same carat as the old Ruritanian nonsense. Sawdust runs out of the heels of the characters as soon as they become serious, and out of their mouths also. But when they are not serious, why then they put on the whole armour of modern folly. Personally I am enchanted by the strictly non-emotional parts of this play. It should be called *The Nolly Dialogues*.

My disbelief in the emotional intensity begins as soon as Krish announces to Nadya that she has succeeded to the throne of Krayia, a tin-pot little country fifteen hundred miles from Paris, dull as its own ditch water, and probably infested with crocodiles. Nadya doesn't want to go because, after many experiments, she has found the man who truly loves her and whom she truly loves. Sabien and she are to be married that very afternoon. Krish insists. Then Nadya has an idea. She and Sabien will get married and go to

America where, under her new name, she will be lost. Krish objects. The newspapers—which, incidentally, took four days to announce the assassination of the late king—will defeat Nadya's manœuvre in less than no time. Nadya then has a lucid moment. "If I sit here and say 'No' without anger or resentment or emotion, just 'No' firmly, and stick to it, what then?" To this Krish returns half a dozen unconvincing platitudes about Royalty being born in a cage, and Love of Country being ingrained in the heart of a Queen. To which Nadya's answer—if she is really the Nadya the author has postulated—is "Dry up and have a cocktail!" But since it is time for her to begin on Mr. McCarthy's romantic exposition of the sense of public duty, she says simply, "What time is the train?" And at once sits down at her desk to write a note to Armand—I mean Sabien—saying that it is good-bye and that she can never, no never, see him any more. Well, I just don't believe it. I don't believe either in Nadya's tearful conversion to a sense of public duty or in her laconic, point-blank farewell. The woman isn't born, or the man either, who could resist talking it over. What I do believe is that Nadya would have come round, say, in half an hour, to the view that being a royalty may be rather fun, that a queen can do no wrong, or better still, can give in to her temperament without questions being asked, and, finally, that there is a way of making the best of both Krayia and Paris. But no. The curtain descends upon Nadya departing for the land of crocodiles in a haze of crocodile tears.

The beginning of the second act shows Mr. Coward again at his wittiest and best. Miss Phipps, the Queen's English secretary (heavenly Ada King !) is gazing out of a balcony in the Royal Apartments at the crowd and the state carriage which is bringing to the palace Prince Keri, the proposed Royal Consort, and his mother. Nadya is standing on the steps ready to receive them, which gives rise to Miss Phipps's acute observation, " If it had been in England, the Queen would have met them at the station." This is admirable. Quite first-class, too, is the hesitating, amused, friendly courtship of the Royal strangers, culminating in the discovery that they both swallow aspirin tablets whole, and so have a good deal in common. To base the entire pyramid of life together upon a single aspirin tablet, whole or crushed, is the absurd inversion which is wit. All this part of the play comes off triumphantly, largely owing to the skill of Mr. Herbert Marshall who, for the occasion, has discarded his familiar charm and invented a new one, remote, unapproachable, slightly expressionistic. He is like a figure glimpsed at the end of a corridor, whom you can never get to know, but who would enchant you if you could.

And now the bombastic hurly-burly sets in. Nadya has been shot at. But the shooter's arm has been knocked up, and the bullet deflected by a man in the crowd. Will the Queen receive her preserver ? She will. It turns out to be Sabien, who has come to Krayia to claim his lover's rights before Nadya is lost in marriage. Mr. McCarthy congratulates Mr.

Coward upon making the pair forget all about that little matter of life saving, but I suggest that discretion is the better part of this forgetfulness ; the coincidence of the right man in the right place demands altogether too much explaining. And now the two fall to the very hammer and tongs of passion. Will Nadya give Sabien the night before her wedding ? He promises to shoot himself in the morning like a perfect gentleman. Nadya is " all for it," in the vulgar phrase. Her love of country is not proof against this young man, drawn and haggard with desire. What if Krayia's next ruler is a bastard ? Krayia will never know, and Keri will forgive. So they fall to it after supper, at which meal Nadya *says not one word to dissuade her lover from shooting himself.* This is frankly inhuman and therefore incredible. The pact has been made before, notably between Cleopatra and the slave Meïamoun. But in Gautier's story it was the Queen who made the condition. The son of Mandouschopsch was a slave who would have blabbed.

All this time a revolution is a-ripening. Is it because of a piastre off the pay or other economic bone of contention ? We do not know. We hear nothing of any efforts to settle matters, Krayia's court knowing no concern beyond the amorous. It is hinted that it is the Queen's lightness of behaviour which is applying the torch. But doesn't Mr. Coward realise, and Mr. McCarthy too, that profligacy in a reigning house has never formed either cause or pretext for rebellion. The time when Kings and Queens have been most dissolute

has been the time when the idea of Monarchy has been most firmly enthroned in the general heart. Never have monarchs lived so chastely as to-day, and never have there been fewer of them. Krayia's revolution could only have been economic and it is quelled by a speech from Nadya in her nightgown on the balcony. And what a speech! Our old Ruritanian master would have blushed at its baldness, and besides, it is exactly the kind of thing which would have brought a hail of bullets. A mob besieges the palace out of hatred for its mistress; the mistress appears at a window and insults and flouts the mob; the mob turns into little whipped dogs which trot off home. No, Mr. Coward, no. Sabien commits suicide according to plan, and Keri kisses the Queen's hand. Which gesture signifies that little infidelities of the sort must be accepted in the best regulated Royal families. No, Mr. Coward, and a hundred times no, Mr. McCarthy. Considered seriously this piece is nonsense, ineffable nonsense, if you like. Taken as light-hearted, theatrical entertainment it is very adroit and very amusing. Some time ago I fell into Mr. McCarthy's error and, like the little girl in Mr. Beerbohm's Matthew Arnold cartoon, asked Mr. Coward why he was not wholly serious. But this play has made me change my mind. I exhort Mr. Coward henceforth to be wholly flippant. Miss Madge Titheradge and Mr. Francis Lister play very finely and keep preposterousness in leash.

September 15.

"Escape"

An Episodic Play by JOHN GALSWORTHY

Ambassadors' Theatre

AN episodic play is like a serial on the film into which you can chuck anything that comes along. If a film looks like being popular and the producer wants to lengthen it by another week or two, he simply throws in another incident. The hero boards a 'bus going past St. Paul's Cathedral which, the hero reflects, contains the tomb of the Duke of Wellington. And he will be a very stupid film producer who fails to get ten thousand feet out of the Battle of Waterloo and the hero's reflections. Or perhaps the fellow mounts a 'bus going past the Tower. Whence the evening may be pleasantly occupied watching the beheading of Lady Jane Grey. This is the episodic film, and an episodic play is built up rather on the same lines. You can't, in the case of a picture which is a perfect whole, lop off a thousand feet here or add five hundred there. Neither can you lengthen or shorten a play which is a perfect whole. But you can add to a piece which is made up of a number of incidents none of which has any connection with the others except that the hero is common to them all. The convict in Mr. Gals-

worthy's play has seven adventures before he is captured, and there is really no reason, except that it is eleven o'clock, why he should not have seventy.

There can be no doubt which way the playwright's sympathies lie. He is always with the hunted as against the hunter, with the fox against the man in pink, with the chicken against the marauding fox, with the chickweed against the chicken, and doubtless with whatever it is the chickweed preys on against that ferocious plant. This is very noble, always presuming it isn't a little maudlin. But Mr. Galsworthy, in spite of that fund of human sympathy which he can turn on like a bathroom tap, is still a great playwright. It would be a pity that he should end with a piece like *Escape*, and I suggest to him with the greatest possible respect that this must not be his last play and that he should bend up all his spiritual and mental faculties for one more final effort and make his bow with something worthy to rank with those masterpieces *The Silver Box*, *Strife*, and *Justice*.

Is it possible that Mr. Galsworthy rather muddles the issue by making his convict so obviously the victim of mistaken justice? After all, your sympathy with the hunted fox has nothing to do with whether it is a decent, kindly, tolerant, large-hearted fox or a crafty, ignoble sort of fellow. Why not have made Captain Matt Denant just the least little bit guilty? It is hardly necessary to write a whole play to prove that four years in gaol is a bit rough on an innocent man. But perhaps the play is meant to deal less with the man

who escapes than with those who connive at his freedom. Mr. Galsworthy is really putting a question to each member of the audience. What would you do if you were faced by an escaped convict? Run like blazes, is the obvious answer. So let me put it another way. What would you do if the fate of an escaping convict lay in your hands? Personally I should bring him to the bar of my own mind. If I knew him to have robbed those who could afford to be robbed, then I should let him go. The man who had "done down" bookie, moneylender, or company-promoter should be at liberty to do it all over again, and good luck to him! Whereas I would have no mercy on the Farrows and the Bottomleys who defraud the poor. But the thing I should principally ask would be: Did this man harm his fellow creatures, or did he merely offend one of society's prejudices? Everybody who goes to this play should make up his mind on these points. Be it noted that the women characters are uniformly sympathetic, and that the more intelligent among the men are the more humane. But that the convict should give himself up in the end to save the parson from staining his conscience is just bosh. Galsworthian bosh, of course, but bosh.

The author, as usual, is at immense pains to prove that a good man need not be a prig. Hence we get the sporting allusions, which he manages to get all right, and the low-life talk which is just as much all wrong. It is obvious that Mr. Galsworthy has never conversed with blonde ladies in Hyde Park at midnight; otherwise he would know that they do not fall

to abstract discussion of their profession. The frail do not talk about original sin, nor do they invite their gentlemen home to their flats to admire a tom-cat. Neither do the men discuss with these enchantresses the comparative merits of the noble racehorse and the tribe of wantons. Mr. Galsworthy seeks to photograph life, and gets some of it unnecessarily wrong. What modern man ever said to a constable "I *smote* him on the jaw!"

I thought that Mr. Nicholas Hannen relied rather more than usual upon his charm, and that he didn't seem in any particular hurry to get away. He *would* make those delayed, actor-ish exits where a convict would simply have bolted and let the manners go hang. And then he was handicapped by the always fearsome facetiousness of his author. Humour was never Mr. Galsworthy's strong point, and in this piece he seems to be insisting that it is. On the whole Mr. Hannen's performance had merit and distinction; also a certain gymnastic facility. How many actors other than Little Tich can listen to the heartbeats of a man prone on the ground without bending their knees? Admirable performances were given by Messrs. Leon M. Lion, Stafford Hilliard, Austin Trevor and Cyril Hardingham. I thought Mr. Lion particularly good as the second convict. And now will Mr. Galsworthy please present us with the Hyde Park drab as she really is? The young lady in this play would in real life spend her evenings fox-trotting at the Grand Babylon.

August 25.

"Berkeley Square"

A Play by JOHN L. BALDERSTON in collaboration with J. C. SQUIRE

St. Martin's Theatre

JACKASSES who would not have tweaked the tail of the living lion have been heard to bray that James the novelist is dead. This may or may not be true, the point being that James has not been dead long enough to get his second wind. All great writers when they die suffer a temporary diminution in popularity, falling often into something very like oblivion to be followed by a come-back, the nature and period of which are variable. An author who was precious to the few may never be read again except by the precious few, or he may in his second innings strike the imagination of the whole reading public. The period varies from Trollope's forty years to Meredith's fifteen. Pondering any page of James and noting the glossy surface, the lustre and the sheen of words, it is surely presumptuous to prophesy annihilation. Yet perhaps the seeds of nothingness are sown in the very elaboration of it all; is it possible that the imperceptible does not admit a hundred view-points? And can we stomach

four hundred pages of this rich bamboozlement? It is just conceivable that James the novelist may be dead, though one ventures to think not so hopelessly as our door-nailers suppose.

James the dramatist is a different pair of shoes. He cannot be dead who was never alive. One of the most pathetic things in the history of the theatre is the life-long conviction of this narrow refiner in ideas that he could broaden them for the theatre. This is an old fallacy; probably the jeweller never breathed who did not believe that he could make the descent to pots and pans as successfully as any tinker. Yet the gifts are not the same, or anything like the same. A play is not a novel coarsened to delight a serried mob breathing down the back of each other's necks. The remark of the American to the immemorial English butler—" To whom do you, beautifully, belong? "—sets the novelist's page a-tinkle with mischief and irony; spoken on the stage it is a knell. No word or collection of words can be shy enough to describe the pith of a James story, whispered by the writer and overheard by the reader. Whereas the method of the theatre is the method of the town-crier.

Mr. Balderston, in collaboration with Mr. Squire, has taken his plot from that posthumous fragment *The Sense of the Past*. One knows instinctively what James could, would, and must have made of an American swapping identities with an Englishman living one hundred and forty years earlier. One senses the hesitant delicacy with which James's centuries would

kiss and commingle, and the sly chicanery of writing bent on keeping the reader's attention to this or that "value" and no other. But in the theatre the bonds cannot be drawn so tight. Show the spectator an action and you will have his whole mind; speculate and theorise for him, and he will begin speculating and theorising for himself. Our authors in their first two acts give the spectator too much time in which to ask himself what he would do if the clock were suddenly to be put back a hundred and forty years. Personally, I should have recited *Dolores* to Doctor Johnson and asked him what he made of *that*. (Always presuming, as this play does, that the Great Man was still alive.) Or I should have tried some of Wilde's best epigrams on Sheridan, or watched Jane's face while I told her about Dorothy and Sir Francis Beekman and Mr. Eisman's theory of education. I should certainly have mentioned the railway and the telephone, and probably journeyed up to Fifeshire to tell the golfers about the rubber-cored ball. But the effect that Peter Standish's later knowledge might have upon a previous generation is quite elaborately not our authors' point, though in the theatre the spectator will insist upon making it. Nor are we to concern ourselves with the inevitable and tragic concomitant to knowledge of the future—the absence of surprise. No material slavery can be comparable to the servitude of predestination, and we wonder how Standish can keep quiet about it.

But the particular "value," in the Jamesian sense, to which our attention is drawn is Standish's disillusion

at meeting his adored eighteenth century face to face. This disillusion really amounts to very little more than that the women have a poor notion of the beauty of old furniture and that the men do not wash sufficiently. It is to establish this that an unconscionable amount of machinery has been requisitioned, including elaborate explanations as to the curvature in Time. Now it would be foolish to argue that not Einstein with all his mathematics can bring back yesterday, nor Pirandello at his most ingenious arrange for a cake to be eaten the day before it is baked. For the theatre has to make a beginning somewhere, and every sensible playgoer will concede that for the purposes of dramatic discussion centuries may be laid on top of one another like a sandwich. Only there must be something of a meal to follow, and for the first two acts this play gave us little except pleasant dresses, vigorous " period " acting, adumbrations of half-hearted spookery, and some not very pointed irony.

The third act seemed to me to be on an altogether higher plane. This was concerned with the spirit of the modern Peter Standish and its reaching out after the spirit of Helen Pettigrew, who died a hundred years earlier. Here the dry bones of Relativity were stirred by a breath of something human. A timeless epoch was postulated, and it seemed easier to accept this peaceful dimension, in which time was not, than the wrangling one in which the centuries set one another by the ears. Perhaps I am an inveterate sentimentalist. Certainly I could take little interest

in Peter's lessening enchantment in the presence of contemporary *bric-à-brac*, and it is equally certain that I found the love affair to be very moving. There is fragrance in the young spirit knowing that it cannot encounter love this side of the grave and fading like a flower which has lost hope ; and there is pathos in the lover who lives too late. Perhaps the acting was better here than in the earlier parts of the piece. Mr. Lawrence Anderson said his last few words admirably. For they dealt in human emotion, and those who remember this actor in *St. Joan* will realise that he can be as moving in a simple fashion as any actor we have. He said one other line beautifully—"The veil is thin for you." But I suggest that the introspective does not lie in this actor's personality. Something dæmonic, perturbed, brain-sickly was wanted for this part, and I am prepared to believe that if Signor Ruggeri or Mr. Barrymore or our own Mr. Claude Rains had played it the whole effect of the play might have been different. After all, the willingness to abandon your own century and step into another is not a part of normality, and this particular Peter Standish was as normal as a Yorkshire pudding. And Yorkshire pudding, though possibly the most adorable thing on earth, is comparatively useless as an aid to metaphysical questioning.

Miss Jean Forbes-Robertson was quite perfectly in the temper and spirit of her author throughout. Her approach to her art seems incalculable either by herself or anybody else, and I shall certainly not attempt to calculate it here. Her performance in this piece is

eerie and " fey," and contains something of the quality which makes *La Belle Dame sans Merci* a great poem. What that quality is in either actress or poet I have not the faintest idea. It is there, and that is all there is to be said about it. It may be of some use to a young artist obviously standing on the threshold of greatness to be told that both the management and the make-up of her hands require more study. Miss Valérie Taylor did very much more with a poor part than almost any actress I can think of could have accomplished, and Miss Beatrice Wilson, having no truck with transcendentalism, gave a very good performance in high comedy. There was some incidental music of a vaguely mystical character. Taking a hint from the play, I should imagine that the score had been bound up in the same volume with one of Mr. Norman O'Neill's.

October 10.

"Children of the Moon"

A Play by MARTIN FLAVIN

Royalty Theatre

A WELL-KNOWN dramatic critic to whom I was speaking after the second act of *The Children of the Moon*, in which a mother, to gratify her own tortured vanity, sends her daughter out of her senses, expressed the opinion that one of the functions of the stage was to satisfy the taste for morbidity in the spectator, and thus prevent him from doing anything morbid in his own person. I confess that this was an entirely new view to me. "Do you mean," I asked, "that if a man feels an itch towards murder he should satisfy that itch by a performance of *Macbeth*, and so prevent his personal appearance in the dock?" "Yes," replied my friend, "that is exactly what I do mean." "And do you think," I went on, "that a woman who has a leaning towards tippling and light affection would become a model of temperance in both respects by witnessing a performance of *Fallen Angels?*" My friend nodded. "If I were a magistrate," he said, "I should not accept the excuse 'I did it because I saw it on the pictures.' But if a man said frankly,

'I did it because I *didn't* see it on the pictures,' I should think twice before I sentenced him." There is an awful sanity about all the judgments of Mr. Herbert Farjeon, and I should think more than twice before pronouncing any of them to be wrong.

Yet I confess that this aspect of the matter struck me as far-fetched. But then my views as to the effect of art upon life have always been peculiar. I remember as a boy being enjoined to study attentively a series of plates entitled *The Rake's Progress*, and I admit freely that the only effect that Hogarth had upon me was to convince me of the tremendous amount of fun the rake must have had in the early part of his career. Retribution may have followed after, but then it was a long way off, and anything might have happened in the meantime. Suppose a chimney pot had fallen on the rake's head half-way through his career? At least he would have had his good time—nothing could take that away from him. Yes, I think my parents erred with all moralists in thinking that the young ever take any notice of the moral. The same thing seems to me to hold good with stage plays. Virtue may come by its own in the end, but Vice gets a jolly good innings first. What I am driving at is that as a child my own temptation was always to model my life exactly in accordance with the play I had last seen. Thus the effect upon me of such a piece as *Jim the Penman* was to incline me to the art and business of forgery, my only doubt in the matter being as to whether my penmanship—for I am, and always have

been, a bad writer—would have been up to the mark essential to a good forger. Jim got caught in the end, and either went to prison or committed suicide—I forget which. But didn't he, in the meantime, keep a valet to put out his evening clothes, and a butler to pour him out champagne? And if you can do that for twenty or thirty years, the rest, to a small boy, doesn't seem to matter very much. But I remember *Macbeth* as being a very much more moral play, for the simple reason that retribution followed at once, and that the murderer never got any fun at all out of his murder. Mr. Farjeon's experience was probably entirely different. It would appear that if ever he felt any leanings towards either rakishness or forgery—which I beg leave to doubt—those leanings must have been promptly satisfied and put an end to by the works of art mentioned above. I wish some older philosopher who knows all about these things would go into this matter a little more fully. I find it easier to believe that a man should hack his sweetheart to pieces because he has read the highly-coloured newspaper account of some degenerate crime, than that he should do it because he has never read or heard of such a possibility. Yet it may be that what is poison to the weak intellect may be food to the strong mind, and Mr. Farjeon beneath his delicacy of style, is the intellectual Sandow of us all.

It is always unpleasant to be hoist with one's own petard. For years I have been preaching the right of the dramatist to lay down whatever premises he likes

and the duty of the playgoer to accept those premises and confine his questioning to the conclusions. Now comes Mr. Martin Flavin, who asks me to believe in moon-madness. Mr. Shaw's philosopher, depositing an offending book in the wastepaper basket, admitted generously that he had not read it. I make the same confession about the standard work on moon-madness, though admitting that the very word " lunacy " hints that at some remote period Man must have credited our satellite with power over the tides of reason and unreason. A mild superstition prevails to this day. Some people cannot sleep in a moonlit chamber, others dislike looking at the new moon through glass, while even the outwardly sane have been known at sight of the slender sickle to turn over their money and murmur " Rabbits." There is no accounting for the tricks which awesomeness may play upon one. I have heard of a young man who sat up very late at night in an empty house reading about the Great Nebula in Orion, when suddenly a fractional idea of Immensity dawned upon him, so that he screamed, got into bed fully dressed and pulled the clothes over his head. But astronomers are inured to this. I have never heard that Schiaparelli wanted to bathe in his Martian Canals, and I do not believe that Judge Atherton, this play's ardent amateur of the telescope, really felt drawn to forsake his cosy villa and fly to the moon. Nor do I believe that his son had the same strain of madness, nor yet that his grandson, a flight-lieutenant, went up one night during the war, flew into the full moon and disappeared,

leaving his machine to come down safely by itself. Perhaps on Monday night last I did not try hard enough to believe in the lunatic trio. Probably Alice's White Queen would have done better, for she, if I remember rightly, boasted that by dint of trying she had believed three unbelievable things before breakfast.

Sticking to one's guns, one would say that this question of believing or not believing is not to the point, since they are Mr. Flavin's premises which must be accepted. Essentially, his play is concerned with the presumably sane woman whose relations to the moon-struck family are those of daughter-in-law, wife, and mother. Mr. Flavin presents her without apologies as a monster of egotism sucking a ghoulish melancholy out of the misfortunes of the brain-sickly family into which she has married. The deaths of her husband and son have given her an importance which she would not otherwise have enjoyed. She has still a daughter, who, it appears, is to devote her life to being her mother's companion, and the real conflict in the play is that between the daughter's happiness and the mother's insatiate selfishness. Up to a point Mr. Flavin's achievement is a considerable one. Mrs. Atherton does not appear until the second act, yet she is so vividly presented to your consciousness by all that the characters say and think and feel about her that you already know her by the end of the first act. At the beginning of the play Jane Atherton, the daughter, has fallen in love with an aviator detained in the house owing to an accident. Jane's grandmother, in the

absence of her daughter-in-law, has given her consent to the engagement, realising that attack is the best method of defence, and that the only way of defeating the insensate mother is to present her with a *fait accompli*. The part of the grandmother was admirably played by Miss Mary Rorke, who foreshadowed very cleverly the always unequal contest between the gentle and the ruthless.

Nobody can excel Miss Miriam Lewes in the portrayal of shrews. To make the monster credible a *tour de force* was necessary, and Miss Lewes produced one. If this Mrs. Atherton was, perhaps, not entirely feasible that was the author's fault; the actress certainly made her plausible. There was a cold ferocity and a malignity of self-absorption in every word, look, and gesture. Ostensibly, the daughter shall not marry an aviator, because aviation has not brought this family luck. But we feel that neither would she be allowed to wed him if he were an engineer tunnelling miles below the earth's crust. Jane will marry when her mother approves, which will be never, since she has not the remotest notion of dispensing with her body-slave. There is a battle royal, the culmination of which is that the mother tells the daughter of the taint in her blood, proclaims her unfitness for marriage, drags her to the window, and, forcing her to gaze on the moon, bids her deny that she is mad. Whereupon the girl falls to wriggling and writhing and screaming that she had always known the owl was a baker's daughter. The whole of this second act was excellent

theatre. And then it seemed to me that the play fell to pieces. For the young aviator now strode steadfastly upon the scene and declared his intention of sticking to Miss Micawber whether she was in her mind, out of her mind, or half-way between. Whereupon the young lady fell into a trance, and said that nothing would content her but that she must fly to the moon that very night. So the aviator told his mechanic to bring the plane round. The mechanic objected that there wasn't more than an inch of petrol in the tank. The aviator, calculating that this would take them up to a height sufficient for a satisfactory crash, told the mechanic to mind his own business. Then the pair set off and the curtain fell. Which, to any sane and normal way of thinking, was unconscionably like flying in the face of absurdity and getting there.

The three people in this play who were really mad were the mother whose egotism was an obsession amounting to insanity, the healthy young aviator who wanted smacking, and the mechanic who ought to have been court-martialled for obeying orders. A member of the intelligentsia told me that he " adored " this play, because it was an essay in the influence of suggestion upon the unbalanced mind. It seems to me that this is a psycho-pathological interest rather than an æsthetic one.

Mr. Farjeon's view is that this play will prevent weak intellects from weakening still further. I do not agree. But the evening was undoubtedly interesting and Miss Delia Dellvina succeeded in hanging some

wisps of sympathy upon the distraught young lady. I suggest that it is time managers found that good actor, Mr. Felix Aylmer, something to act. To allot him the eye-glasses and platitudes of a woolly-minded general practitioner was to waste a clever artist.

October 24.

"This Woman Business"

A Comedy by BENN W. LEVY

Haymarket Theatre

THIS piece with the hideous title may not make a very good play, but it is an extraordinarily good entertainment. It has everything which a play should have except a good plot—characterisation, wit, and pre-occupation with the stuff of which ideas are made. Therefore you might say that though the "swarry" is not particularly good, the trimmings are "extra." The plot is almost incredible. A confirmed misogynist invites four of his kind to come down to his newly-built manor house in the wilds of Cornwall, and spend a holiday uncontaminated by the society of Woman. We see them after dinner discussing their common aversion. At once all the old war-horses are saddled and trotted out, such as that Woman has never produced any geniuses, or at least that you can count them on the fingers of one hand. There is some bandying of names here, and one reflects that if Hazlitt's title had been "Of Females One would Wish to Have Seen" his essay must have been of lesser scope. Perhaps the misogynist-in-chief puts his finger more nearly on the

difference between the sexes when he says that Woman is "impervious in the mass to ideals and unable to appreciate where the personal element is lacking." This time you reflect how clever it is of Mr. Levy to provoke the interest of the large feminine majority of playgoers by means of the frontal attack.

In the meantime we realise that these woman-haters protest too much, and that the first petticoat will bowl them over like ninepins. A glance at the programme reveals the name of Miss Fay Compton, and our suspicions are confirmed. For all practical purposes the play is over before it has started, the only point to be decided being which of the five she will marry. But you might make the same sort of objection about *Much Ado About Nothing*, the opening exchanges between Beatrice and Benedick making it quite clear that the two must ultimately find each other's arms. The question one asks in Shakespeare's case is When? in Mr. Levy's, Whose? Our author must have been at his wits' end to get the girl on to the scene at all, and I am not going to pretend that he has done it very skilfully. Still, any excuse is better than none, and so we pretend to believe both in the young lady who is caught wandering about the grounds of the Manor House and in her story. This is to the effect that, being left penniless, she had taken a job as private secretary, and had allowed her employer to make advances to her because she was afraid of losing her job. Then one day she grew frightened, grabbed at some money which happened to be lying about, and came for

refuge to her aunt's cottage, which, it happens, was pulled down to make room for the Manor House. Presently it appears that by another happy coincidence her former employer is the business partner of the owner of the manor. He obligingly comes down to rehabilitate the character of the young woman, who in the meantime has been promoted from housemaid to typist. All that remains, therefore, is for her to be made love to by all the members of the party, except the one she wants. And, of course, even he succumbs when the girl explains that she is not an adventuress or, in the alternative, that an adventuress is what every right-thinking young woman should be. For the greatest adventure in life is creating another life, and woman is not inferior to man because she refuses to waste her time on morality, art, and the rest of masculine toys. What Woman stands for is the Life Force. So the arch-misogynist, whose bitterness was largely founded on the belief that the girl preferred somebody else, crumpled up and threw at her feet his essay on "The Inferiority of Woman," which she at once picked up and triumphantly tore into little pieces.

Mr. Leon Quartermaine and Miss Fay Compton played the two leading parts as well as they could be played. But the real interest of the evening centred in three wonderful pieces of acting by Messrs. Sebastian Smith, Bromley Davenport and O. B. Clarence. Each of these actors is a past-master in the art of comic portrayal. Take Mr. Smith's Brown, and note how you shall read in the sleek, overdressed, fussy, expansive,

self-important, likeable little bore the small Surbiton villa, the large wife and copious family. This actor brings back to the stage an art which we thought to have died with Weedon Grossmith; the tricks may all belong to the same bundle, yet they appear to be of infinite variety, and our delight in them is unceasing. Against the insignificant, home-keeping Brown is to be set his *bête noire* Crofts, who is in his way even more ludicrous, and wearies everybody with travel stories and clock-golf. You gaze with unending rapture at that bald and foolish cranium, the rolling eyes showing too much white, and that dejected mien which is less that of a human being than of a vulture. Mr. Bromley Davenport gave huge joy.

The trio is completed by Mr. O. B. Clarence's somnolent, senile Judge, who stands for all that old age may achieve in the way of selfishness. You can make the trio into a quartette by adding Mr. Mollison's giddy goat, a young sprig of nothing in particular, who would regard a world war as a lark and is quite capable of earning the V.C. between two practical jokes. Or into a quintette by including that fine romantic, Mr. Cellier, who in a lounge suit sniffs at the modern world with a flick of the nose like a fox terrier. There is some good playwriting in the combinations and permutations of all these jealousies and rivalries, and good playwriting, as everybody knows, makes good playgoing. The piece could be improved if it were shortened by some twenty minutes. There is one admirable hit right at the end where the old antagonists

Brown and Crofts, discovering that they have both loved the same woman, patch up a peace. This is beautifully written, but comes too late to be fully appreciated. I confidently recommend this piece to students of idiosyncrasy and lovers of good acting.

April 18.

"And So To Bed"

A Comedy by J. B. FAGAN

Queen's Theatre

ONE of the knotty points of criticism is to know when to stick like glue to one's own personal tastes and when it is wiser deliberately to come apart like Lady Shelton's headbands in the amusing book. It happens to me sometimes that while recognising the great qualities in an author he still, as they say, leaves me cold. "I admit that Brahms is a giant," a musician once said to me, "but every bar he ever wrote just makes me *prickle with dislike*." Now it so happens that I adore parody and detest pastiche. The one is a living form, the other pure mummy. Then I have a curious inhibition—presuming that's the right word—against the stage presentation of heroes whose destiny was determined and accomplished before those who look on at the play were born. I like to think that the dramatist has a free hand with his characters and is at liberty to determine whether such a one as Macbeth shall reform or go through with it. But we know beforehand what happened to Nelson and Byron and Charles the Second, and a play written round these

characters seems to me to lack dramatic purpose in the same way that predestination takes incentive out of a man's life. I do not defend this natural disability to enjoy historical melodrama, or suggest that it is general. The above is in the nature of an apology.

Now add that the departed personage has already been made familiar to me in another medium. Is it not obvious that henceforth the medium and the personage are inseparable, and that without the second the first cannot exist? What I know of Johnson is really Boswell's view of him, and *as he looks on the printed page*. A clever actor can take to himself a paunch and a wig and the habits of discourtesy and snuff-taking, but the assemblage for me will not be Johnson. How, then, can Pepys be Pepys outside the covers of his own Diary? In the play under notice Mr. Fagan has done all that is "humanly possible"—two words which have always been tantamount to failure. Not failure upon practicable levels, of course, but on the plane of the idealised impossible.

Mr. Fagan has achieved as much success as mortal may command. He has postulated a Pepys of distinction, a Pepys who descends to the infirmities of the flesh against his will. But even so the theatre is the theatre, and what can a Pepysian play be made of, except intrigues, hidings in my lady's chamber, and what-not? How could any writer for the stage hope to convey that scope of mind and spread of interest which account for such a sentence as "The town, I hear, is full of discontents, and all know of the King's

new bastard by Mrs. Haslerigge, and, as far as I can hear, will never be contented with Episcopacy, they are so cruelly set for Presbytery." In Pepys's mind there were no full stops. It must have been heart-breaking to Mr. Fagan to have to discard such a passage as this and incorporate the bellman's comparatively insignificant "Past one of the clock, and a cold, frosty, windy morning."

If, in another sense, Pepys's mind contained all the stops there are, only one can be of any use to the playwright. Common sense tells us that nobody could make a play out of "To Deptford by water, reading *Othello*, *Moore of Venice*, which I ever heretofore esteemed a mighty good play, but, having so lately read *The Adventures of Five Houres*, it seems a mean thing." Or out of Pepys's bravery in facing the Plague and not running away from the Fire. That way the cinema lies. Or even out of Nell Gwynne and my Lady Castlemaine, upon whom Musical Comedy has a lien. No; the essential Pepys is in pen and ink upon paper, and set down in a cypher for which the stage has no key. But something can be done, surely? Yes; and that something, one repeats, Mr. Fagan has accomplished very brilliantly. The scene in which Pepys hides in Mrs. Knight's boudoir, to be pursued by his wife and surprised by his King, is admirable comedy. Yet it occupies one-third of the time of the play, whereas the reference to the lady in the Diary in a single one—to the effect that she is a singer whom he hopes to hear. This scene is an admirable

example of the strength and weakness of the theatre in reconstructing a period. A stage-play about Pepys must be a play about his new mistresses and the old wifely quarrels, yet you shall finger the Diary for an hour and not come upon an indiscretion or a reconciliation. And the sentimental episode is, as we all know, the very breath of the stage. Therefore, watching this piece, we did well to put the broad world of Pepysian exploration behind us and dwell with the author in the minor ways of the amourette, the quarrel, and the peace-making. And blessings, we said with the poet, upon those fallings-out that make it up with tears.

Mr. Edmund Gwenn looked very much as Pepys probably did look—that is some twenty years younger than the popular image of him. But did not men mature earlier in those days? Pepys finished his Diary at the age of thirty-six, by which time he was as dry a stick as the modern man at sixty-six. Mr. Gwenn was not that, but he acted very well, and looked like a painting by Zoffany. Miss Yvonne Arnaud pretended very happily and quite unsuccessfully to be the "wretch" of tradition. But the day when this brilliant actress succeeds in being other than her delightful, enchanting self will be a sad day for at least one playgoer. She made one wonder how Samuel could desert Mrs. Micawber. Miss Mary Grey added charm to dignity, and sang with both. Mr. Allan Jeayes as Charles the Second made one think of what the wit said about Kemble's acting in comedy: "He has a smile, but it is like the plating on a coffin."

This is probably the proper way to play the heartlessly merry monarch upon whose character Mr. Fred Terry, obeying romantic taste, has lavished too many buckets of perfumed whitewash. Harpsichords, viols, viols da gamba, and other quaint musical wildfowl chirped agreeably and tinkled tactfully throughout an entertainment which it would have been curmudgeonly not to enjoy. One may not care very greatly for plays about Pepys, but at least one may safely say that no play about him could be better. Those who like the *genre* will be enchanted with this example.

September 12.

"All the King's Horses"

A Comedy by CHARLES ELTON OPENSHAW

Globe Theatre

THERE is a kind of salt, stinging honesty about the stage-personality of Miss Irene Vanbrugh which has endeared that charming actress to us all. We feel that she is particularly English and essentially of her time and ours. Consider the *rôles* in which she has made her greatest successes — Rose Trelawny, who was Dickens's Miss Snevellicci, but with less archness and more heart, Sophie Fullgarney, the manicurist who could stand up to a Marquis, Nina Jesson, that second wife who didn't so much mind having her cheek slapped by a first wife dead and in her grave as turning the other cheek to her predecessor's family. Consider the period in which these fine pieces of acting occurred. Rose was the living embodiment of the Tennysonian tag about faith and coronets; Sophie stood for democratic sanity in a period which, according as you were æsthete or policeman, was all yellow pageant or yellow peril; Nina brought a breath of fresh air into the hot-house atmosphere of Dodo, Paula Tanqueray and Esther Waters. A Sargent,

one thinks, might have made a group-portrait of her at this period and called it " *Sophie, Nina, Nina, Rose.*"

But one of the signs by which you may know a great artist is the power to put forth a new kind of fruit when the old one is no longer the mode. The wave of frivolity which passed over the London stage during the war swept the downright and the " jannock " out of fashion. This artist " packed up," as the soldiers say, in the way of serious emotion, and put mind and brain, if not heart and soul, into the delicious trivialities of Mr. Milne. And perhaps it may be lawful to make the point that her Olivia and her Belinda were ladies. For the sterling quality persists in this actress, and it is inconceivable that she would consent to embody any of those modern heroines who pretend to be that which they are not, and conceal so ineffectually that which they are. The British public has an unfailing *flair* for honesty, and I venture to think that it was this quality underlying Miss Vanbrugh's purpose and conviction which was the primary cause of her great reception. But the ovation was deserved on the other score as well ; the number of our actresses who can act is not so large that we could afford to be indifferent to this artist's return. One has the belief, though the metropolitan stage does little to encourage it, that the feeling in the country generally is for a return to greater seriousness in the theatre. I, personally, cannot believe that the British stage is to remain in perpetuity the penitent stool of fallen womanhood, and not so penitent at that. I believe that honesty, wayward if you like, but still

honesty, is on the point of coming into its own again, and that this actress is going to restore to us our proper inheritance.

In the meantime Miss Vanbrugh begins operations with Mr. Openshaw's agreeable trifle, to which one may listen without loss of self-respect. I am not quite sure whether "playwright" is quite the correct term for Mr. Openshaw, or whether "play-decorator" would not be a better word. I do not mean that he is like an architect who should design a very beautiful façade and leave the contractors to put up the house behind it, but that his talent is rather that of the house decorator who really doesn't care very much what sort of place he is given to beautify so long as he is allowed to carry out his own ideas concerning beautification. Any old room will do provided the artist can splash about at will with his paint-pots of ivory and jade, and any old plot will do for this playwright provided he can colour it after his own wit and fancy. The story of a young man who wants to be an artist and declines to go into his father's business, of the young woman who insists upon marrying an impecunious young fellow of noble mind, the father who finds his greatness, which has ripened to the point of Birthday Honours, nipped by the killing frost of an early indiscretion, a mother who out-does the worm in patience but turns at the end —all these have been the mainstay of playwrights and novelists from the days of Tom Robertson and Mrs. Henry Wood.

But Mr. Openshaw makes these familiar characters

handle their rue with a difference, and in this matter difference is all. He has as much right to go to Stanley Houghton for his revolt of the younger generation, to Sir James Barrie for his theory of knighthood for a wife's sake, and to Mr. Noel Coward for the Dutch courage of his half tipsy lady as Shakespeare had to go to Hollinshed. And, of course, the digger who has any virtue of his own ends by getting a quite new stone out of an old quarry. Take the attitude of the wife who is told by her husband, the city magnate, that twenty-nine years ago he became the father of a child. Have not all previous wives overtaken by so belated a pronouncement sobbed that in such a case they must have spent a married life of shame, and generally rounded on their husbands as though for each and every one of those twenty-nine years he had brought up yet another child outside the social contract? But the wife in this case does nothing of the sort. She simply declares that what her husband did before they were married is of only this interest to her, that it gives her a handle over the old donkey, who will henceforth be good enough to conduct himself properly as far as she and her children are concerned. This is a good sensible speech.

The characterisation is good throughout, the horrid nullity of the young people being particularly well observed, and it includes an excellent sketch of an Oxford syren turned harpy. The best thing about the whole piece is the quality of the dialogue, which is brilliant just because it is never too brilliant, the

author creating the illusion of life by the simple expedient of leaving his characters sufficient breathing space between the epigrams to say that they are going out shopping or some other credible detail. The talk avoids most skilfully both the gin of literary wit and the snare of the merely smart. At the same time one might suggest that Mr. Openshaw would do well to abandon the over-worked vein of light comedy and dig a little deeper. What about a light tragedy, say a piece in which a self-satisfied husband discovers that his supposed doting wife has hung herself out of sheer *ennui* behind the spare-bedroom door? But in the meantime one must be grateful for a decent comedy for decent people. Incidentally, decency is made extremely amusing. As Humpty-Dumpty Mr. Allen Aynesworth was pomposity itself, while the harpy of Miss Mayfren was most amusing. If I say nothing about Miss Vanbrugh's acting it is because to praise her achievement in this, to her, easiest of parts would be an impertinence.

January 31.

"The Twin"

A Play by VERE SULLIVAN and GEORGE BRENCHLEY

Everyman Theatre

"SHOW it me!" said the Yorkshireman. Now I neither believe nor disbelieve in spiritualism. That a thing cannot be explained is no proof that it does not exist. I believe in the pen in my hand, the fly on the window-pane, the sun and moon, and on a fine night in the Great Nebula in Orion. Yet nobody has ever been able to explain how or why these exist. Explanation not being the test for reality, I am prepared to believe in a ghost as soon as I see one. But I warn that ghost that I shall begin by hitting it hard on the nose, and go on to devote my remaining energies to ascertaining that I have not been the victim of hallucination, biliousness, hypnotism, or jiggery-pokery. But until I behold I must rely upon the ghosts seen by others. The extraordinary thing about people who are psychic is their wilful abrogation of the logical faculty and their willingness to believe the stupendous on evidence which is not strict enough to convict the meanest pickpocket. Then their ghosts talk so reason-

ably. Personally, I should expect a being in another dimension to be almost entirely unintelligible, and the greater the gibberish it talked the more I should be inclined to believe in it. The one kind of ghost in which I will not believe is your strictly rational sort that talks the mush and twaddle of the halfpenny novelette. But I do not deny the existence of ghosts, affirming simply that the people who claim to have seen and held converse with them are less exacting in the matter of evidence than any other class of human being. On the whole, I am inclined to think that a ghost is a phenomenon in every way as reasonable as, and no more inexplicable than, a pound of steak.

It will be gathered, then, that I went to this spiritualist play with what is called an open mind. It would obviously be no good taking to such a piece a mind shut to spiritualist possibility. The thing to do, I suggest, is to accept the authors' premises and then see what they make of them. The Rev. Lothian Maitland had married a wife who, in the early days of their marriage, developed mediumistic qualities. This apparently shocked the other members of the Vicar's congregation so much that they promptly communicated with the Bishop. The Bishop, doubtless a good and eminent Victorian, said the lady must give up being a medium. Whereupon the Vicar's wife left her husband and three children and set up in business as a professional clairvoyant. The eldest child was a girl, and as little psychic as a rice-pudding. The other two were twins—one a boy, of whom we are told nothing except that he was

killed in the war, and the other a girl, obviously " fey " and living on the border-line of experience. The Vicar has decided against the probability that Pearl may be psychic, and this in spite of the matter of heredity and of the fact that the doctor who attended Pearl in an illness following her brother's death had warned him of the girl's very marked mediumistic tendencies.

When the play opens the Vicar is engaged in a campaign against the spiritualist lectures of Sylvia Brent, the famous medium, who is, of course, the former Mrs. Maitland. Pearl has been to see Sylvia Brent, who has concealed her identity from her daughter, but encouraged her to make use of those psychic qualities by the aid of which she hopes to renew acquaintance with her dead brother. Roddy, it appears, has spoken to Pearl and has promised to materialise as soon as she becomes more expert. Now you must understand that the Vicar took his strong line against the spirits, not because he believed in them so little that he deemed them humbugs, but because he believed in them so much that he knew all about them and their most intimate particularities down to the fact that they were emanations of the Evil One. At this point the Vicar's wife intervened to warn him about their daughter. Pearl, she declared, being a medium, was in great danger from her father's mania for exorcism. For if you were nice to a spirit the spirit would not do the medium any harm, but if you were nasty the spirit would do all the harm it could.

Most opportunely one of the Vicar's choir-boys became "possessed." The Vicar promptly exorcised the inhabiting devil, whereupon the boy went raving mad and died. Did this teach the Vicar a lesson? Not a bit of it. He promptly exorcised his daughter's familiar, whereupon the girl nearly died on the spot, afterwards falling into a long illness. When she recovered there was a battle royal between the father and the mother as to whether the girl should continue to exercise her faculty, the mother saying that it would be all right if she didn't do it in the dark, and the father declaring that he wouldn't have it at any time of day. Then the spirit of Roddy took a hand, appeared when it was not bidden, and invited Pearl to throw herself out of the window, which she did. Whereupon another clergyman, himself a medium, who had been brought in by the Vicar to help, evoked the spirit of Roddy, who obligingly appeared and straightway confessed that he was not Roddy at all, but an emissary of the Devil who wanted Pearl's soul for himself.

The moral of this play is that a man who is so stupid as to use towards his daughter the same measures which have succeeded in killing a choir-boy should not be allowed to be a clergyman. As a piece of art the piece is negligible, as a contribution to psychical research it is null, as threatrical entertainment, provided the argument is disregarded, it is quite good. We are carefully told that these materialised visions are projections from the medium's own body. This being so, how is it that the ghost, which is an ectoplasmic projection of

Pearl, should be visible to the cook and the other people in the house but not to her? This, I submit, is not to behave like honest putty. How is it that the Vicar doesn't tell the mediumistic clergyman whom he consults that his daughter's mother is the famous medium? But one could go on asking lots of questions. Nobody in the piece seems to have the faintest sense of being in the presence of something which is either pure humbug or a phenomenon of a size and significance comparable with Time, Space, and all the Immensities. The Vicar who believes brings to his belief a mental equipment on a level with that of an African witch-doctor. Spiritualism, if it exists, is wondrous strange, and as a stranger we should follow Hamlet's advice and give it welcome. To declare off-hand that a phenomenon, which may for all we know be as actual as the telephone, is the manifestation of a purely hypothetical personage like the Devil seems to me to be purely silly. I suggest that this play must offend anybody possessed of a logical or scientific mind.

To cast Mr. Lawrence Hanray for the Vicar was the height of infelicity. Mr. Hanray is an extremely capable comedian, and that the Vicar could have poked his comical nose so unshrewdly into all this business seemed highly incredible. As the psychic daughter Miss Valérie Taylor gave a performance which, following upon her Nina in *The Sea-Gull*, places her definitely at the head of all our younger actresses. Miss Irene Rooke's mother-of-Pearl was a jewel.

July 4.

"The Gift Horse"

A Play by J. B. STERNDALE-BENNETT

Everyman Theatre

IN his new play at the Everyman Theatre Mr. Sterndale-Bennett has attempted the always difficult task of running with the hare and hunting with the hounds. This time the hare is the bad girl of the family, and the hounds are the outraged supporters of moral law and order. During the first act we hear little of the hare, the hounds being occupied in baying the moon in the person of an elderly woolgatherer whose life has been spent in aiming at the stupendous and missing it. John Periplot, of Wandalming, was the only one of his large family who realised that in comparison with her brothers and sisters straying Janet was, in the soldier phrase, whiter than the whitewash on the wall. But he could not stand up against his wife, who was one of those rigid precisians quick to suggest that a daughter were "better dead and in her coffin," and so on and so forth. Periplot weak-mindedly consented to all the obloquy his family could cast upon his daughter, and allowed them to heap multitudinous insults upon her through-

out twenty years. The old lady, dying at long last, Periplot took a coward's revenge and made a will, leaving all his fortune to Janet and nothing to the rest of the family. But here again, having no fortune to leave, he made a mess of it. Finally he was reported killed in a railway accident ; but, being a boggler ever, could not achieve even that. So he turned up on the morning of his funeral to face a thoroughly disgruntled family.

Now Janet arrives, summoned by filial duty and affection, only to be subjected to every sort and variety of cold shoulder. Hereabouts it appears that she is the possessor of vast wealth in her own right, or should one say wrong ? Up to this point we have been conscious that the author was running with the hare to the extent that she had the best of his sympathies. But now he makes Janet declare that she hated her lovers and came by her great fortune by false pretences. According to an old jingle the faculty of " giving too little and asking to much " was something to be deplored. But Janet, with a good Dutch quality of obstinacy, turned this vice into something we are asked to take for virtue. Here we cannot help asking whether generosity has not always been the redeeming feature of the courtesan ? *Tout comprendre*, etc. Bearing in mind another tag, we may ask whether forgiveness shall be accorded to one *quia multum detestavit ?* Janet proclaims a career of chicane which justifies all the nasty things which her brothers and sisters have always said about her. In other words, we have taken the author

to be running with our own likeable hare, whereas all the time he was really hunting an ungenerous creature of his own.

In addition, Janet is improbable. She announces her intention, while still in the possession of well-preserved youth, looks, spirits, and fortune, of retiring from the world, nursing her aged parent, turning the family out of the house, and using the ancestral home as a cloister in which to compose her soul. She has for twenty years hated her way of life, but not, it seems, sufficiently to relinquish it until she has amassed capital yielding five thousand pounds a year. And now, holding her course to Wandalming, this quean—

> Means to immure herself, and not be seen.

In token whereof she slips off her natty shoon and slips on the bedroom slippers of the old gentleman dozing in his chair. Which finds us echoing the expression of incredibility proffered by Miss Betsey Trotwood to Mr. Murdstone.

Miss Athene Seyler fluttered about in her brilliant way, and did her utmost to make Janet cohere. Whereas, unfortunately, her author had devoted most of his energies to dismembering his doll and showing us how little pretty and likeable a doll could be. The story is really another version of Maupassant's *Boule de Suif*, for in the matter of giving away her ill-gotten wealth Janet was generous enough. Mr. Sterndale Bennett can doubtless find in the great French writer authority for the conventional retirement and ultimate

seclusion of luxurious ladies. But one remembers that the storyteller did not insist upon this until, as Mr. Austin Dobson puts it,

> With the coming of the crow's-feet
> Goes the backward turn of beaux' feet.

The Gift Horse may have little to do with real life, but I hasten to say that it is an amusing trifle, well acted all through. Possibly Mr. A. Bromley Davenport as the cast-iron failure overacted a little. But to underact would have been fatal, and it may well be that the part does not admit of any middle way.

November 14.

"Half a Loaf"

A Play by NOEL SCOTT

Comedy Theatre

DRAMATIC art is a sea which bears on its broad bosom many vessels and various. There are ships of tragedy and galleons of high comedy, floating hotels in which the expensive heroines of Messrs. Coward and Lonsdale swop continents and vanities, tramp steamers of repertory, and cockle-shells of pleasure. Little boats must keep in-shore, and the sea-mark of their utmost sail is the very faintest simulation of the passions. There may be considerable fun in skimming the shallows, and a light comedy is not to be scorned because it proves to be a comedy which is also light. Mr. Eadie's new piece is a trim enough little craft, and one hopes he has not cast his half-loaf upon the waters in vain.

It is surely a critical mistake to be particular about nothing and portentous about nothing in particular. *Half a Loaf* is intended to be airy nonsense, and it is not to be urged as a fault that it is nonsensical and airy. Mr. Scott knows as well as the author of *Hudibras* that

> He that complies against his will
> Is of his own opinion still.

He knows, and we know, that a man cannot be married against his own conviction, and that though you may

drag him to the church door he will not sign the register. Therefore, when Ann McGovern, plentifully backed by her father, bullies into marriage a man who is not in the least in love with her, we know perfectly well that the author's tongue is where in the case of a light comedy it ought to be—in his cheek. The point is not whether Ann could have made her accusation of betrayal. When the father, believing the worst of Michael Challenor, heaps upon the poor fellow spates and cataracts of abuse in which his victim tacitly drowns, the point is still elaborately not whether in real life a man falsely accused would be unable to sketch the beginnings of a denial. What we are to ask ourselves is whether the author, having made preposterous assumptions, has extracted sufficient fun out of them to make us overlook the preposterousness. I venture to think that throughout the first two acts the author of this little piece has entirely succeeded. His play is, in my opinion, at least as rational as *Alice In Wonderland*, and his characters, being set like Lewis Carroll's in the absurd plane, behave logically in that plane. The first two acts therefore move deliciously in a ripple of fun. That the third act is not quite so successful is due to the fact that the author has forgotten that characters in an unreal play should always remain at the same distance from life. We do not believe in Mr. Scott's creatures when they drop their mask of wilful folly and pretend to be serious. But a great number of playgoers like a dash of sentiment "to" their evening meal, and the author has

taken care to leave a number of witty straws floating on the surface of his sentimental stream. Clutching these we never quite drown. Altogether the evening was one of the most pleasantly irresponsible I remember for some time.

The author is doubtless grateful to his players. Miss Phyllis Titmuss's acting of the too-constant nymph had all the entertainment of a running commentary. The actress gave us not only the absurd child, but her own delicious sense of absurdity ; she did not labour nonsense in the effort to make it convincing, but asked us to share her delight in it. Miss Hilda Moore made a fine display of beauty and sullens, and Mr. James Lindsay's hurricanoes were of the size proper for farce. But the strength of the evening lay in Mr. Dennis Eadie's brilliant playing up to Miss Titmuss. He acted Michael, the impressionist painter delighting in portraits of chartered accountants shaving, with considerable charm and a good deal of quiet fun. In the words of his friends, this Michael was "a bit of a comic." Mr. Eadie certainly made convincing the happy spirit of an artist who can allude casually to the great race owning Cortez, Calderon, and Cervantes as "a crew of greasy dagoes," and escape literal interpretation. "It is a mistake," said Beerbohm Tree, "to show your humour to the humourless. They will use it in evidence against you." But Mr. Eadie was in no such difficulty. His humour was delightful, and it went down delightfully with his audience.

November 14.

"Conflict"

A Play by MILES MALLESON

Queen's Theatre

HERE, one said as the curtain cut off gratified players from an excited and demonstrative house—here is a first-class piece. And one rather envied the critic who in the next half-hour may write out of his enthusiasm and before second thoughts have got him in their dismal clutch. How good, exactly, is this mixture of politics and melodrama? Well, certainly not as good as anything by Mr. Shaw or Mr. Galsworthy in major mood. Probably not quite so good as Mr. Harwood's *A Grain of Mustard Seed*, though now I think we are getting somewhere near it. As a piece of drawing-room melodrama it is as good as need be, and as a ding-dong, cut-and-thrust exposition of the Capitalist-*versus*-Labour dispute it is probably as highly intellectualised as the theatre can stand without ceasing to be the theatre. For, after all, the dramatic stage is not the place to decide what Karl Marx did or did not mean in 1867.

Everybody knows roughly what Capital and Labour stand for, and the business of the playwright is to pit

these approximations against each other. The Labour representative points out to the lady of noble birth that she and her father take up the space of sixty bedrooms and the time of twenty servants, while there are hundreds of thousands of people in London fending for themselves and making shift to live three in one room. Score : One up to Labour. Capital retorts that the modern Trades Unionist would turn up his nose at conditions of living which five hundred years ago were good enough for monarchs. Score : All square. Labour says that with the immensely increased output of modern machinery nobody should lack boots, and its score is again one up. Capital retorts that if Labour makes it impossible for us to compete with Germany and America, not only will the rich man have to make one pair of boots last him five years, but the poor man will have taken from him even the boots which he wore out long ago. And again the match is all square.

Subtlety, one takes it, is better expended upon the mouthpiece rather than the message. Possibly Mr. Malleson's mouthpieces are not very complicated. There is the elderly peer who believes that Socialists can be divided simply into fools and blackguards. There is the young nobleman, engaged to the peer's daughter, who holds more or less the same view. To them enters at midnight a young Socialist, once a Cambridge graduate, now reduced by the war and economic stress to the Embankment and a state in which he steals pound notes, pinches cigars, and generally pitches the

tale. Perhaps in watching this admirable first act one had the feeling that Mr. Tom Nesbitt was getting rather more out of it than there was there. Certain it is that he made very fine show of an unbroken spirit in a broken body and kept the flag flying in a sea of distress. The act ended with two examples of that generosity with which Capital meanly takes the wind out of Labour's indignant sail. The rest of the play could have been foretold as soon as one heard the word " election." We knew at once that the young nobleman would be found standing on the Tory side, while the Socialist candidate could only be the ex-thief who would convert, fascinate, and finally marry the peer's daughter and Conservative candidate's fiancée. But a good deal of water has to flow under the bridges before this happy end can be obtained, and some of it is rather dirty water. The peer is so enraged at his daughter's projected misalliance that he threatens to tell the Labour Party that its man is a thief. The peer's daughter can go one better. She has been the Conservative candidate's mistress for years, and his supporters are welcome to put that piece of scandal in their pipe and see how they like the taste of it. Elderly peer crumples up, and there ensues some fumbling among the magnanimities. The curtain descends with the rival candidates linked arm-in-arm, making purely impersonal, passionless, and academic exposition of their policies from the balcony of the peer's house.

The best thing in the play is the implication that the solution of the political problem lies beyond the limits

of human conception, which we remember to have been Herbert Spencer's way of dealing with things like Infinity and the First Cause. This being so, peers will always be found handsomely regretting that the thing which their moral conviction tells them is best for the nation should also be convenient to themselves, while on the other side agitators must always be still more agitated to find that the spoliation of the rich as a class must incidentally benefit the individual poor. The author, barring one or two superficial little inaccuracies, showed great feeling for character, and his elderly peer was delightful. That Mr. Kerr revelled in the part, and that the audience revelled in Mr. Kerr goes without saying. Mr. Malleson should at once cut out the suggestion about his Labour candidate having studied music at Cambridge. Mr. Tom Nesbitt gave a very fine performance throughout, but he never persuaded anybody that he knew B from a bull's foot. This young working man was obviously the son of a four-loom weaver in Rawtenstall, who had read snatches of *Das Kapital*, and saved enough to send his son to Owens' College. As for Miss Jeans one wanted to go down on one's knees and thank her for not letting anybody else play the part. Lady Dare Bellingdon was really minx, imbecile and snob, or would have been but for her enactress, who gracefully substituted her own charm and intelligence, incidentally doing some very competent and business-like acting, including one admirable moment at the end of the second act. But that Lady Dare could go to a

Labour meeting in the East End befurred in bluest fox and a gown worth half a king's ransom, even Miss Jeans didn't make us believe. And I must really quarrel with Miss Margaret Yarde for not knowing that the midnight aprons of London landladies have lost some of the virginal purity with which it is unsafe to credit them even at breakfast time.

April 11.

"The White Witch"

A Comedy by A. P. HERBERT

Haymarket Theatre

THE Haymarket tradition has always risked the defect of its quality. Utterly purposed that it will not offend, the inoffensive tradition must always have dullness trailing at least in the proximity of its skirts. Something like a genius is required to persuade us that the innocuous is not the goody-goody; and we reflect that this theatre has always been fortunate in enlisting playwrights who have known how to walk this tightest of ropes. That Mr. Herbert is a wit all readers of our comic paper know well; that he has the root of the playwriting business in him everybody who has seen *Riverside Nights* must suspect. His first full-length play turns out, alas! to be Milne-and water, which, we remember, happens on occasion to Mr. Milne. In both cases the reason would appear to be the inability to recognise that a comedy is more than an extended joke. You cannot turn a *friandise* into a *pièce de résistance* by making it bigger; neither can you make a play out of those blameless, rather pointless parables about the Melindas, Lucindas, and the males

of their kind. These are properly skits, and the essence of a skit is slightness. To expand it is to destroy its essential virtue.

The White Witch begins well enough. There is the black-and-white artist hampered in comic quest by a loquacious piano-tuner and a wife demanding to be loved even at the moment of inspiration. We believe in both tormentors, who are really well done and admirably acted by Mr. Sebastian Smith and Miss Cecily Byrne. We have not quite the same faith in the artist who appears to alternate comic sketching with painting a full-size picture of the young lady next door. Perhaps it is the room which is not right ; it is too tidy, and a single full-length canvas without the artist's litter or evidence of previous attempts in the line fails to convince. At this point we are introduced to a bouncing Major, blowzed like Tennyson's milk-maids with all the moral health there is, and as self-sufficient a pragmatic as any enemy of our race could desire or invent. Mr. Herbert has touched in this portrait with a malignity which suggests Respectability tearing at its own entrails. The character is the best in the play, and Mr. Henry Caine played it very well. One wondered whether the constantly reiterated " old boy " was as wearing to the actor as it was maddening to the audience ; there should be some modification of this. Last came Jenny, the young lady next door, with devastation in her eye. It was soon arranged that the wife and the Major should accept invitations to the same house party and leave Jenny free to beguile the

husband. The whole of this first act was heavy with preparation, each of the characters sowing with both hands the seeds of drama to come. Would John be able to resist Jenny, and how would Ruth face the Artillery ?

The second act was a surprisingly barren affair. Of our second couple we heard nothing, the scene now being the deck of John's yacht, becalmed in the middle of the English channel and a summer night. This was not the missed train or broken-down motor of your vulgar amorist, but the genuine trick of the weather, welcomed, as it turned out, by the little puss Jenny and deplored by staid John, who sat himself athwart the davits or binnacle, or whatever it was, and lectured on the beauty of self-control. After a bit Jenny pretended to fall into the water, whereupon John kissed her and proclaimed his passion. And having proclaimed it, he proceeded to make tea, with, as he carefully explained, tepid water. I am afraid this was subconsciously symbolical. John at his most urgent was a lukewarm creature, and though we had boards in plenty there was no passion. For after the tea had been drunk, John fell to sermonising, in the course of which he expounded to Jenny the full beauty of renunciation. She was to pine away and die ; and he, presumably, intended to grow old reading Leigh Hunt's *Jenny Kiss'd Me*. Afterwards John launched out on some tedious war recollections proving him to be a Jonah, and finally fog came on and a liner came up to cut his tale and the yacht in two.

In the third act it appeared that John had been saved and Jenny drowned. So John spent the next two days putting the finishing touches to Jenny's portrait—an incredible feat in a bereaved lover. Ruth returned from the house party, where she and the Major had apparently marked time, and decided to patch it up with John, Jenny being out of the way. But Jenny wasn't really drowned and came back from the French coast, which she had reached by dinghy and passing schooner, dry and smart and smiling. So Ruth knew she wanted to leave John. A long and quite preposterous scene followed, in which the Major posed as a bullying divorce-court counsel and persuaded John to make Ruth happy without dragging Jenny's name into it. John consented, and the couples re-sorted themselves. Incidentally I am of opinion that Ruth's petition would have been laughed out of court. A fog is a fog both in the Channel and in law.

The trouble about this play is that it is thin without being fantastic, and deals in the matter of passion without the spirit. The characters threaten wonders and do nothing. You cannot write a story about treasure-trove unless treasure be found ; nor can you write a whole act round two lovers alone between sea and stars and fob them off with school-boy conversation about good form. Not even Wagner could have built an opera round Tannhäuser cold-shouldering Venus or Isolda being " not at home " to Tristan. Mr. Leon Quartermaine could make little of John, who was about as entertaining as King Mark refusing to flirt

with Brangäne, and Miss Fay Compton was never happy with Jenny, who was quite null. And nullity having always refused to be acted there is no reflection here on Miss Compton's art, which simply was not, and could not be, brought into action. Mr. Herbert must try again, and I suggest that he should be utterly purposed to discard the gloves and square up to the passions with the bare fists. In making this suggestion I am presuming that Mr. Herbert insists upon remaining wholly serious—a defection which, in my view, modern humour can ill afford.

October 3.

"A House of Cards"

A Play by LAURENCE EUSTON

Little Theatre

TO quote one of the good things out of this amusing little play, it is astonishing how many people never go to bed on the same day that they get up. Night watchmen, police, taxi-drivers, actors, journalists—these have their excuses, but there would appear to be people who spend the day in dreaming of green fields and the night in babbling over green tables. These are the members of bridge clubs, lineal descendants on the distaff side of the Dowager Lady Snuphanuph and other ladies "of ancient and whist-like appearance." Only Miss Bolo has taken to crossword puzzles, and Mrs. Colonel Wugsby keeps her weather eye open for cheats.

This play is about one of those mausoleums miscalled Bridge Clubs. My readers know the kind of thing I mean. Spinsters tottering upon the verge of the grave make the passionate declarations which they have never received, retired generals throw away tricks just as they did lives, while the better halves of diamond merchants burst into tears at a shilling a hundred. I

have upon occasion risked my skin in one of these dens of tea and toast, malice and uncharitableness ; and my recollection is that of a nest of bosom enemies or a vulturine congress flapping baleful wings. To sit at the same table with a woman bridge player is one of the dread things of the earth. Either she is so bad that to win from her is to take the bread out of her husband's mouth, or so good that you feel she has missed her sex as some people have missed their vocation. Why shouldn't women bridge players be as good as men ? will be gently coo'd by a thousand meek doves. There is no answer except that such an hypothesis cuts across that masculine view of the universe which assumes that whatever Man does, Woman should be content to do a little less well.

It is the privilege of the playwright to make his own postulates, and the author of this piece has taken full use of this right. He or she asks us to assume that a woman whose husband has a small post in the Diplomatic Service will spend about five times his income in the good cause of entertainment and preferment, that she will cheat at the tables night in night out to make good the deficiency, that her detection will bring about her husband's complete ruin, and that her only remedy is to take poison. Well, one might say that women have died, but not for this. It was said of a certain actor's Macbeth that murder was not so serious a crime as all that came to, and one was a little inclined to ask whether in real life Lady Tremayne would not simply have gone to the Riviera until the

tea-cup storm had blown over. And one asked whether, if Sir Hugh Tremayne had been a fashionable surgeon, his wife's disgrace would have resulted in the letting off of guilty appendices. But granting the author's assumptions, the play is entertaining. It is nowhere amateurish, and indeed harks back to the best Greek models ; battle, murder and sudden death of reputation taking place off-stage, while distraught messengers break the horrific news to a chorus of club habitués acting as commentators.

But I must be forgiven for suggesting that this is a piece for the leisured classes only. Consider what would be made of it by a collier or a mill hand. I do not imagine that it would occur to working-men's wives to spend five times their husbands' wages in giving expensive high teas to all the employers in the neighbourhood, with the idea of getting their husbands made foremen. But in the upper circles our authors tell us that things are different. I repeat that according to them it is quite the normal and proper thing for the wife of a gentleman in the Diplomatic Service to spend five times her income in giving dinner-parties to Cabinet Ministers in the hope that her husband will be made Ambassador at Borioboola Gha, to recoup which she is obliged to have recourse to cheating at cards. She is, of course, found out. Whereupon she determines to commit suicide without stopping to think whether that will be good for her husband's business or not. She is a wild, impulsive creature and stares at the audience with wild, impulsive eyes which ask if a fifth-floor balcony is not for

the purposes of suicide what on earth are its purposes? Now let us go back to our alleged humbler spheres. During the war I was privileged to make friends with a number of bricklayers, and I can confidently say that not one of them would have been so stupid as not to realise when his wife was spending twenty pounds a week instead of four. Nor have I known one who was so utterly misguided that he would not have clubbed her over the head for it. But in higher circles it is different. Distinguished diplomats appear to think it possible that their wives can roll about in motor-cars, yachts and gambling saloons, and swathe themselves in emeralds and chinchilla, give elaborate dinner-parties and invite eminent virtuosos to throw off little trifles in the drawing-room, all on some few hundreds a year. Well, it can't be done, and personally I do not believe that the destinies of Britain should be entrusted to the hands of a diplomatist who thinks that it can. However, the play is very amusing.

The piece is admirably played by a very strong company. Miss Jeanne de Casalis as the cheat looks lovely and shows exactly the right amount of nervous intensity, Miss Joan Hay as a sleuth looks like the flower and simulates the serpent under it, and Miss Margaret Yarde is a fascinating and likeable bloodhound hot on the trail. Mr. Malcolm Keen casts lustre on the Diplomatic Service, and Mr. Patrick Waddington takes the shine out of most club waiters. Miss Martita Hunt as Lady Tremayne's friend gives a performance of singular beauty. Which is not singular of her since

she is always doing it. This artist has a great power of attack, and her poise and quality suggest that she may be the best discovery in English acting since Miss Edith Evans.

November 21.

"The Rat Trap"

A Play by NOEL COWARD

Everyman Theatre

WHAT a pity it is that Mr. Noel Coward ever published *The Rat Trap*, thereby making impossible any juggling with dates! What should we have said, I wonder, if this play had followed the Ruritanian excursions with the usual West End fanfare and implication that this was Noel's very latest thing in Noelisms? To produce the piece on the fringe of town, half apologetically and as a work of youth and curiosity, was to damage it in advance. Against the blown rose may they stop their nose That kneel'd unto the buds, said the outraged lady in the tragedy. But with playwrights it is the other way round. We make allowances for the master but none for the apprentice. The most we are inclined to say of the dialogue in Mr. Coward's early piece is that anybody can see from it that the young gentleman was going to be witty by and by; the same jokes, occurring in a play written yesterday, would have been gilt with the glamour of previous successes. As it is, there is something of full-grown wit in the remark about the soulful young woman who did her own washing-up with a volume of Verlaine wedged in the soap-box. That this line does

not read over-wittily in print is not the point ; on the stage it comes off admirably.

The play's thesis is the old one—that at a dinner-party it is poor diplomacy to put together two clergymen of slightly differing shades of belief, whereas a bishop and a jockey will get on famously. Only for the dinner-party we are to substitute married life, and consider a couple of literary geniuses interested in each other's work only in so far as they are jealous of it. Even before the marriage an outsider predicts that one of them will have to go under, and that Sheila, being the cleverer of the two, will be the one to make the sacrifice. The second act shows us the *ménage* at high literary pressure like rival blast-furnaces. Sheila wants to read her husband her latest chapter while Keld is equally anxious that Sheila should hear his new last act. The cook can get no orders from anybody, tempers rise, and the whole thing works up into a blazing row. Sheila sees suddenly that what her husband needs is a commonplace, dull, domesticated wife to hang on his words and tell him of their unbelievable brilliance. The objection may be made here that people who are genuises don't go on like this, and that whereas the really clever man would be annoyed with a stupid helpmeet, the man who thinks himself clever will not be satisfied with any other kind. In support one might cite the married life of Browning and Schumann. On the other hand there are those great stumbling blocks, Carlyle and Wagner. Is it to be imagined that the composer's home existence would

have been sunnier if Cosima's genius had brought forth a number of rival little *Lohengrins* and *Tannhäusers*, or that the Ecclefechan crotchets would have been calmed by the wifely issue of a *Philosophy of Feminine Clothes?*

In the third act Sheila, resigned, settles matters in the way Jane Carlyle settled them, by renouncing her own aspirations and sinking herself in her husband's fame. For Keld has achieved fame, and is now a popular playwright, with two plays running at the same time. The cases are not quite on all-fours, since Mr. Coward asks us to assume that in his play the wife has the better mind and the greater talent. But this only gives the situation an additional touch of irony. Sheila says there is no need for her to write any more since her husband does it all. Whereupon Keld purrs complacently that he supposes he does turn out a good bit. Now that his wife is in subjection he feels that he can afford to be kind. He would like to hear if anything in the household goes wrong; Sheila must let his shoulders bear something of the domestic burden. He wishes his wife were the famous one instead of him. Isn't it rather a pity for Sheila to waste the whole of her talent? Couldn't she start work again; some little thing to occupy her spare time? And so on and so forth. Sheila takes all this at its proper value, and I am not sure that Mr. Coward's later work has shown anything more perceptive than this little scene. And then the explosion comes which has nothing to do with letters. Sheila becomes jealous, not as in Mrs. Carlyle's case of a highly cultivated woman, but of an

entirely commonplace little hussy. Keld proffers the usual excuses—that the frivolity and vulgarity of the creature satisfy a side of him about which Sheila knows nothing, that it is absurd to talk about love, that essentially he is not unfaithful. To this the wife makes reply that she has made every possible sacrifice to Keld —ambition, working-power, intelligence. She has slaved and drudged for him, and all that she said about being content with slaving and drudging was a lie. She loathed it all the time. Now she loathes Keld, and is going to leave him. This is really the end.

Sheila was very brilliantly played by Miss Joyce Kennedy, who was best in the quiet passages. The storm scenes were not quite so successful, but it is possible that the writing was not good enough to bear all that the actress tried to do. Was Mr. Robert Harris, looking not more than nineteen, a trifle too young for Keld? Sheila dominated him too much, and one felt that the pair would have settled down into an entirely happy Mrs. and Mr. Humphrey Ward. Miss Adrianne Allen gave a really witty impersonation of the fluffy, feather-headed baggage, not overdoing the commonness and keeping well within the bounds of credibility. Miss Elizabeth Pollock was amusing as a literary vessel of exceeding emptiness, Mr. Raymond Massey contributed a sketch of Chelsea at its lankiest which must have wrung many withers, and Miss Clare Greet was so perfect in the small part of the cook that I very nearly forgot to mention her.

October 24.

Musical Comedy

"The Student Prince"

A Light Opera

His Majesty's Theatre

SEVERAL matters having nothing to do with a strictly critical analysis of this Americanised version of the German comedy called *Old Heidelberg* obtruded themselves on one's attention on Wednesday evening last. There was the peaceful invasion of this country, as witnessed by the babel of romantic noses heard in the *foyer ;* there was the plutocratic pit ; there was the picketing of the entrance to the gallery by a couple of mild and gentle police officers ; there was the discovery that through temerity or inadvertence on the part of the American *entrepreneurs* the list of principal artists included one English name. It may be that what one might call the politics of this production are not matter for discussion here ; in any case I shall not attempt it. But as a critic is bound to over-severity in the case of a friend and over-leniency in the case of a foe, so I should like to say that, disliking some things which were not of the actual performance, I tried even harder than usual to find objects of delight in the show itself.

First, then, let it be said that the chorus exhibited such perfection of drilling as to recall the time-expired soldier who, in Mr. Kipling's ballad, pleaded :

" 'Tisn't my fault if I dress when I 'alt."

American producers appear to have a monopoly of the virtues of the parade ground, but that is probably because we on this side have not hitherto given the subject so much attention. What Mr. John Tiller's genius for discipline did so famously for little ladies of the ballet I have no doubt could also be accomplished in the case of little gentlemen. Anyhow the Americans have done it, and if this piece should win to a success the credit will be to the rank and file rather than the officers. Sometimes one thought that the reiterative students were rather like the small boy who, as the tea party was coming to an end, said hopefully : " Mother told me I might stay to supper if I was pressed." They certainly took their encores with remarkable precipitance. Or perhaps one might say that the understanding between players and audience in this matter was a remarkable piece of team work.

What was the next thing to be praised ? Well, one would suggest that the costumes were extraordinarily handsome, from the uniforms of the Palace flunkeys to the magnificent affair in ermine and blue velvet in which the Prince made the railway journey from Karlsberg to Heidelberg, and in which it was hinted that he had been for a row on the river. There was furniture to make Bayswater householders gape, a parquet

flooring at a hundred pounds a foot laid down by Messrs. Shubert's own men, a riot of candelabra, and a sunset of such brilliance that it illuminated not only the sentimental old Doctor but the occupants of the boxes on the O.P. side. A very remarkable sunset altogether, since it appeared to take place in the bar parlour of the inn.

Perhaps the plot of the piece might be considered next, though to attempt this in connection with a light opera is not wiser, I submit, than to judge the song about the Ukulele Lady by its words. Frankly, these romances of court life are done better in France than in Germany, and I suggest certain novels of Abel Hermant dealing with the lives of minor royalties as a useful corrective to the " revolting sentimentality " of Herr Meyer Forster, to whom, by the way, no acknowledgment is made on the programme. The play, however, will do very well, though one still cottons with difficulty to those University students who in massed formation wave mugs of beer and sing sentimental songs in honour of their flaxen ninny. One could imagine some Lady Bracknell in the audience saying, " My nephew would not dream of toasting a barmaid at the Pig and Whistle. He is an Oxonian." Nor can we imagine an English royalty revisiting his " erstwhile college chums " in full coronation robes. But though the intrepid travellers who have penetrated the bush, veldt or jungle of the smaller German States tell us that those things which the author of *Old Heidelberg* reports are substantially true, we ask

rather whether the tunes are jolly and the comedians clever. One would say that the melodies in *The Student Prince* are fairly good in outline. They are so thinly orchestrated, however, that the score must look like a skeleton. There are no comedians, and such comic business as there is inclines rather to aggravation than relief.

The principals were frankly "not very charming," as Sacha Guitry said of a fellow artist whom he did not want to dispraise. Mr. Allan Prior presented the Prince as a chubby, confident personage in whom there was no possible wistfulness, melancholy, or any kind of nostalgia. One would gather that Mr. Prior is not an experienced actor, and indeed his principal claim to attention must be based upon his having one of the loudest singing voices which it has ever been our fortune to hear. "Opposite him," as they say, was Miss Ilise Marvenga, who should have represented the *ewig weibliche*, but made Kathie into a semblance of one of those expensive mechanical dolls with a staccato utterance. Miss Marvenga also has a voice of exceeding stridency, and her top notes were the most piercing it has been my privilege to endure. The Princess was played by a beautiful French actress, whose English I personally was unable to follow. Good performances were given by Mr. Herbert Waterous, and by Mr. John Coast, the actor whom one took to be of these shores; and there were some moments of pleasant fooling by little Miss Violet Carlson which hinted at the talent of a Louie Freear.

The performance as a whole suggested several reflections. First, that noise can be too loud, and that light opera singers should not resemble rival railway engines letting off steam. Second, that a piece based upon a German story, largely acted by American, French, and German artists, dressed in Paris and presented from New York disquiets British complacency. Third, that if alien impresarios want to endear themselves to the British public they might do worse than commission an English composer to write a light opera, and say or sing it with English actors to a good, old-fashioned, reasonably priced pit. Fourth and last, that though Art has no frontiers there are some frontiers behind which there is apparently precious little Art.

February 7.

"Merely Molly"

A Musical Comedy

Book by J. HASTINGS TURNER

Music by HERMAN FINCK and JOSEPH MEYER

Adelphi Theatre

IT was on my mind as I sat watching this jolly piece that it was all very like a book which everybody was reading some thirty years ago. For who was Henry, Duke of Wynninghame, marrying for her reputation's sake Molly Shine, the Stepney workgirl, and leaving her immediately after the ceremony, except one Prosper le Gai contracting for her soul's sake a virgin marriage with Isoult. It took Maurice Hewlett some three hundred pages to transform Isoult la Desirous into Isoult la Desirée, and Mr. Hastings Turner uses three long acts to work the same transformation in Molly's lover. The hypercritical may object that Dock Lane, Stepney, is not the Forest of Morgraunt. To which I would answer that London Fields and Hackney Downs—flowery meads both—are Stepney's next-door neighbours.

At home that night I turned up an old copy of *The Forest Lovers*. The page at which the book opened contained these words : " She must woo, she saw ; dare she trail this steel-armed lord of battles, this grim executant, this trumpet of God, as a led child by her girdle-ribbons ? " Here, for all time, has surely been set down Mr. Godfrey Tearle, tragedian. Which brings me to the question as to whether a tragic actor should bemean himself by descending to a lower sphere. Now I suggest that we should free ourselves from cant. It is possible that the age of Macready would not have tolerated any such degradation ; but it is probable that it would have shown its intolerance in the best possible way—by flocking to see Macready when he was magnoperating. Or we may argue along Mrs. Micawber's lines. We may admit the conviction that Mr. Tearle's abilities peculiarly qualify him for the tragic business, and ask " if the public refuses to avail itself of those abilities, or receives the offer of them with contumely, what is the use of dwelling on *that* idea ? " Are we wrong in saying that a tragic actor must live ? Now I am not going to pretend that I derive the same amount or quality of pleasure from Mr. Tearle's Duke of Wynninghame that I do from his Othello ; but I am not going to deny that his performance is very delightful in its way. The actor accomplishes the climb-down with all possible dignity. A neo-Georgian Mæcenas confided to me in his brittle porcelain whisper that he was " revolted by the inherent improbability of the whole conception "—

a criticism which might serve equally for Bottom or Malvolio. Mr. Tearle quite rightly made no precious bones about the matter of his part, but loyally accepted his author's premises and abode by them to the end.

The piece opened admirably, almost at once taking the plunge beloved of our slum novelists. Dock Lane, Stepney, was a setting of most excellent realism, including door numbers of the correct shape, and imitation silk stockings with authentic cotton tops and trade marks unobliterated by the laundry. It was a pity, one thinks, not to complete the observance of verisimilitude by an invitation to the Stepney roughs to discard their massive gold signet rings. Mr. Ben Field gave an excellent portrait of a rascally patriarch who peddles in his family honour. A newcomer to London, Mr. Max Wall, began what looked like being a perfectly observed study of the bantam-weight boxer's strut and dart and poise. Miss Pollie Emery let loose a virago redolent of gin. In fact, the whole of the first act went very well. The roughs unanimously scouted the idea of a toff sending a straight girl five pounds a week, unless, of course, he was barmy ; the bevy of local beauties openly declared Molly to be a baggage ; Molly herself, hosed symbolically in black worsted, fluted and carolled her innocence. Presently there stepped out of a Max Beerbohm cartoon and into the riot Mr. Morton Selten, *homme du monde* in the old Edwardian way, and ultimately Mr. Tearle strolled in, ducal and *distrait*, protesting that if the manners of the time were such

that a girl could not blamelessly accept a pittance with which to buy books, why then, by his escutcheon, he would marry her.

When in the second act the scene was transferred to Wynninghame Towers the comedy rose in the social, but dropped in the æsthetic, scale. As the Lady Octavia, ready like her Roman namesake to plough the adventuress's visage up with her prepared nails, Miss Helen Haye rightly abated no jot of her accustomed superbity; and as a dragonsome figure in a wheel-chair Miss Marie Ault was properly terrifying. But the scene was too long and too talky-talky, and the device of the heart-broken goose pretending to be a vamp is worn a little too thin. Mr. Wall, alas! had fallen to the state of the acrobatic dancer, and in the meantime our Stepney friends had put on immaculacy and taken to the dreary round of guests at a house-party. The third act was better. There was a good first scene on board a yacht, and an excellent second scene in which the Isle of Wight was deployed at very nearly full extent. It was here that Molly "knew that she must beguile her husband now for his soul's ease and her own." And this she did very prettily, first in a pair of borrowed ducal trousers and then in a confection of molten gold. And so green Morgraunt, or rather the downs of Freshwater, made these lovers' bed.

Several things charmed me in this little piece. There was the excellent, perhaps too witty, dialogue; there was the absence of the industrious, unfunny comedian;

there was the steady refusal of Messrs. Herman Finck and Joseph Meyer to pander to the epileptic or negroid strain. I have known catchier music, but at least we were spared the abomination of derivative jazz. The real thing is first-rate ; that is to say, it is at least the natural expression of the negro mind. Nobody with any sense wants to see a coal-black Lohengrin or a melon-sucking Parsifal. But that is not to say that one wants to see white people shuffling about as if they kept their brains in their shin-bones. And so I welcome the absence of jazz in this purely English musical comedy just as strongly as I acclaim it elsewhere.

I have left Miss Evelyn Laye for the last because that is the place of honour. I want to say how heartening it is to see an actress abandon the entire caboodle of artificiality and mannerism for the altogether more sensible business of acting. That Miss Laye must have been working very hard is shown by the improvement in her singing. But there are plenty of signs that she is also becoming a good actress—witness the entirely natural way in which she rounded on sceptical Lady Octavia and demanded to know whether she took her and the Duke for "a couple of ruddy liars." The delivery of this was a model of aplomb and perfect timing. Really it looks very much as though Miss Edna Best were going to have a companion in the arduous task of using popularity as a stepping-stone to something better. This piece, in favour of which I give my whole-hearted vote, had

something of a mixed reception. I do not expect my views to be shared by everybody. Musical comedy " fans " will doubtless rejoice that I have seen the light at last. Others will probably shake their heads.

September 26.

"Queen High"

A Musical Comedy

Queen's Theatre

GEORGE B. NETTLETON and T. Boggs Johns—what's in a name, if not humour?—are partners in a business concern remarkable for the fact that though it runs to two lady secretaries and twenty-four comely shop assistants, it does not, so far as one could see, boast of a single customer. It is an axiom that no steak and kidney pie can be a success without at least one bit of kidney, and it would seem reasonable to assume that a business depending upon customers should come under the same ruling. None appears, however, and the assistants while away their time in singing, dancing, and otherwise comporting themselves agreeably. But chiefly in dancing. These lilies of the counter toil not, but they spin. And spin furiously upon axes of the latest American elegance. In the meantime the partners quarrel, perhaps not with genius like Potash and Perlmutter, but at least with application. Since they cannot agree as equals, the solicitor acting for both of them proposes that they shall play a hand at poker, the loser to serve the other as

body-slave for the space of one year. But the winner's triumph is short-lived. The servant makes love to his master's wife, and this on the occasion of one of those sumptuous dinner-parties to which the twenty-four lady shop assistants have all been invited. They are accompanied by the once morning-coated and now dinner-jacketed fledgling drapers, who contrive to be utterly unlike Mr. Wells's description of them. Ultimately, it is discovered that a contract for servitude based upon a gambling game is illegal. So the partners become co-equals again, and it is hinted that the business will be doubled. But even in the matter of customers one thinks that twice nothing will still be nothing.

The first act was saved by its last quarter of an hour, in which Mr. A. W. Baskcomb and Mr. Joseph Coyne put up a scene of admirable dissembling. The acting of these two immensely capable comedians, from the dealing of the cards down to the culmination of distressful horror and horrific glee, is the most brilliant that I remember in musical comedy. Here is real burlesque acting, so good that you could transfer it to the high comedy stage without greater alteration than the flicker of an eyelid. Can any man paint misery like Mr. Baskcomb, or joyous confidence like Mr. Coyne ? The latter picks up his cards first, one by one, and as he does so a serener glow suffuses that already happy countenance. But you divine a fly in the blissful ointment. A third party seeks to glimpse the miraculous hand, and the impatience of Mr.

Coyne's repulse suggests that the hand may not be so entirely miraculous. Now it is Mr. Baskcomb's turn. Beads of perspiration stud that forehead, the voice trembles, the hand shakes so that it cannot lift the cards. He slides them to the edge of the table. From the looks of agony the first two cards are small ones, and not even of the same size or suit. At the third card a quiver of delight shoots through the unheroic frame. This gambler has a pair, if only a little one. I shall not complete this recital, since it would be unfair to the one really good thing in the piece.

The rest deals something mechanically with a mechanical situation. Here again it would be hardly possible to admire excessively the resourcefulness of these two comedians, who perforce must imitate the spider and run up and down the vacant air spinning the web of humour out of their own personalities. I cannot think that there were more than six witty lines in the last two acts taken together, yet these actors gave the impression that wit was radiating. Mr. Baskcomb has for theatrical ancestor little Robson, that actor of the comic mask and tragic soul. Our modern comedian is in like case : there is a wealth of passion beneath his impotent gestures, and in the cowering frame a spirit to withstand the rudest buffetings. I suggest that he could play an Othello of the suburbs and in broadcloth, and give us the essence of the business. Mr. Coyne, being the Robin Goodfellow of the modern stage, is of Dicky Suett's lineage. Like Lamb's actor, he " comes in to trouble all things

with a welcome perplexity, himself no wit troubled for the matter." These two actors are the play. They keep it going. For them none of the politic savings, fetches of the breath, and husbandry of the lungs which are the permitted economies of the tragedian. They are jugglers in comic notions, all of which must be kept in the air at once ; for if one falls the whole piece comes to the ground. If anything can ensure a full house it will be this pair of aces.

Mr. Sonnie Hale and Mr. Frank Masters dance well. What the piece chiefly lacks is a leading lady who can act, dance, sing, and convey a quality of personal charm, or do any two of these things supremely well, and the last irresistibly. One swallow does not make a summer, and one talent will not suffice for a musical comedy actress. Miss Anita Elson dances delightfully, but her greatest admirers will not suggest that as a songstress she is unimpeachable. And in musical comedy you must chirp with the voice as well as with toe and heel. Miss Joyce Barbour has shown in another place that she has considerable burlesque talents not unlike those of Miss Connie Ediss. Then why limit Miss Barbour to portrayal of the lady-like when her genius is for simulating divergence from that quality ? Miss Stephanie Stephens has some capacity for the vapours, but should overcome a stridency and violence of declamation painful to any sensitive ear. Miss Hermione Baddeley makes the terrific most of an inconstant nymph of the sculleries. Yet one must suggest that the salvation of a musical comedy will not

come from below stairs, too long a line of heroines having queened it in samite, mystic, wonderful. And Coddles in her bib and cap can hardly do that. The main fault with *Queen High* is that is hasn't got any Queen.

The music is more than a little reminiscent, and it is a pity that the song which is "plugged" oftenest should be so like the most insistent tune in *Tip-Toes*. I have no idea which was written first, and there is no suggestion that either composer copied from the other. It may well be that themes consisting of dirge-like reiterations of three notes are uppermost in the present-day American musical mind. But the similarities of the obsequious chant remain. And I really must suggest that in the matter of costumes honey is the best sauce to sugar. In other words, magnificence should be doubled by taste. The dresses worn by the chorus in this piece constitute the housemaid's dream of Sunday afternoon.

November 7.

Revues

"Riverside Nights"

LYRIC THEATRE, HAMMERSMITH

MR. NIGEL PLAYFAIR has produced a high-brow revue, nearly all of which can be very heartily enjoyed by anybody who cares to make the effort. A little of it is dull, of that peculiar shade of dullness of which only intellectuals are capable. Take the dialogue between Bossuet and the Duchess de Fontanges, taken from the *Imaginary Conversations* of Walter Savage Landor. Let it be granted that modern taste is not bored by this author whose page, as Swinburne said, is "dark with excess of light." Let it be granted that Mr. Playfair's audience recollects who Bossuet was, and does not confound that gentleman with Boileau, whose memory is kept green by a public-house on the further side of Hammersmith Bridge, the Lord knows why! But all that is no reason why we should listen to a long recitation of the school-room order by a young lady whose Duchess does not suggest anything more French than a milk pudding.

Then isn't it something of a mistake to give *Thomas and Sally* after *The Policeman's Serenade?* Of the two little operas I personally infinitely prefer the

modern one, of which the score by Mr. Alfred Reynolds is pure enchantment. I suppose Arne is still a delight to many people, but I confess to having had quite enough of the eighteenth century for the time being. *Rule Britannia* is all very well, but again personally, I would give everything that Purcell, Dibdin, Arne, Linley, and anybody else composed in England till Elgar came—I would give the lot for five bars out of *Rosenkavalier*. I hate the schoolmaster in music, and *Thomas and Sally* is a prim bouquet culled and offered by a pedant. However, there is this much to be said for this insipid stuff that it will not bring the blush of passion to any listening ear, and that to like it is in itself a mark of respectability.

Dr. Arne out of the way, the entertainment loses its museum aspect and becomes altogether jolly and delightful. There is an historical drama entitled *Lambert Simnel and Perkin Warbeck in the Reign of Henry VII.* written by Master Michael Cowlen, which I take to be the pen name of Master Michael Playfair. This is obviously the work of a young dramatist in the making. "Do you not think our followers may turn upon us after they have been sticking up for us for some time?" is a question which must have occurred to the greatest of all historical dramatists. But perhaps the most delightful sentence is Perkin Warbeck's "Hurry up with your rebellion, Lambert, as I am getting mine ready in case yours doesn't come off." After a rapid throw-back to the sixteenth century in the shape of an admirable soldier

song, we come to what is easily the best thing in the show, a little song entitled " It may be Life . . ." The scene shows a servant's bedroom. At the head of the abominable iron bedstead stands a screen powdered with Gloria Swansons, Ramon Navarros and other stardust. The little slavey compares her life with the heroes and heroines of the screen. Her daily, weekly, yearly round you know already ; she is to enlighten you as to her night out. We gather that she spends it under a lamp-post enfolded in the arms of a stolid unimpassioned " clurk." In the mind's eye you see what the poet calls " the dejected haviour of the visage " as he glues his cheek to hers. At the approach of some rival does his revolver bark ? No. All the fellow does is to say glumly " 'Op it ! " And the rival 'ops it. There is sublimity in the refrain—

> " Then 'e says : Friday ?
> And I says : Right,
> Then 'e says : Same Time ?
> And I says : Quite."

This is a little masterpiece of writing by Mr. A. P. Herbert, admirably set to music by Mr. Dennis Arundell. Miss Dorice Fordred sang it with something approaching to genius. There was desolation in the way in which she threw herself on the bed and described in the air tragi-comic circles with her black woollen-stockinged leg. Was ever drudge so bored ?

After the joyless Landor we had some music-hall songs resuscitated by Miss Elsa Lanchester and Mr. Harold Scott. I don't quite understand what this

clever pair of artists mean by their performance. If their intention is to give these old songs their original vigour and point they fail badly. If they are trying to burlesque them they fail again for the simple reason that their renderings are too near the originals. In fact, I detected in everything that they did a horrid note of Bloomsbury superciliousness, of pity for the low-brows who were once amused by such a song as "More Work for the Undertaker." I remember Miss Lanchester's admirable performance as Larva in *The Insect Play*, which was a realistic and very clever portrayal of a thing definitely intended to be ugly. But I cannot pretend that I like her present material. Mockery in itself is not a sufficient quality for an artist, and I do implore Miss Lanchester to look round for something in which she can for once be sincere. She might begin by learning the rudiments of the harmonium, and not perform arpeggios in the treble when somebody behind the scenes is playing chords in the bass. There can be no doubt about the cleverness of these two artists, who should, however, go into the fresh air for their next material, and discard the preciousness of Sunday night coteries. Mr. Scott, when acting in the legitimate, is an artist of very great talent indeed, and I have a grateful recollection of many performances of singular pathos and beauty. But I suggest to him that he and his colleague are making a great mistake in offering Mr. Playfair's high-brows a programme unworthy of the Victoria Palace.

I have left too little space in which to do justice to

the burlesque by Tchehov. This is parody of the very highest order, and entitles Mr. Herbert to sit down even in the presence of Mr. Max Beerbohm. I am not going to describe anything that happens in this brilliant piece of fooling, and will content myself with saying that, however wild with rapture it will make the non-Tchehovians, they will be outdone by the disciples of the Russian master. Miss Marie Dainton as Mrs. Patrick Campbell rhapsodising over a bowl of goldfish is sheer delight, and so, too, is Mr. Nigel Playfair himself, who contrives to look like John Bright, Walt Whitman and W. G. Grace all rolled into one. Mr. Malleson contributes a newsvendor of adorable pessimism, and perhaps the only fault in an otherwise perfect cast is Mr. James Whale, the goalkeeper who shoots the wrong person. The mistake about Mr. Whale is that he is too perfect. He is, you see, a Tchehov player, which the others are not, and everything that he says and does is impregnated with a melancholy futility which is altogether too authentic. The proper thing to do, I submit, is to have Mr. Whale removed and give the part to some doorkeeper, who would play it ten thousand times worse, and for this particular purpose be ten thousand times better. Altogether a very clever and thoroughly enjoyable entertainment in spite of one or two poor patches which have doubtless been cut since the first night.

April 11.

"The Co-Optimists"

His Majesty's Theatre

HOW many people realise the enormous prevalence in this country of the inane habit known as Musical Comedy? Turning the leaves of a recent little book about the theatre, which I incidentally wrote myself, I happened on the statement that of the fifty-four plays which have achieved a run of six months and over during the last twenty-five years, twelve only were serious pieces against forty-two light comedies and farces. Yet in that same period no fewer than eighty-five musical comedies and revues had run six months and over. Statistics, it is always said, can be made to prove anything. They can't. I defy any statistician living or dead to produce, imagine, or invent any figures whatsoever showing that the English have at any time since the Conquest, or before, taken the slightest interest in the serious drama, except possibly during the age of Elizabeth. There is another proverb which declares that facts are stubborn things. This commands my complete respect.

One evening during the war I overheard a party of lively young men discussing what to do after dinner. Piece after piece was mentioned but they could come to

no decision. So I approached them and said : " Gentlemen, I have some acquaintance with the theatre of this town. Would you like to see a play of spiritual purpose and noble intent, couched in fine nervous English, which will send you to your beds braver and better men ? " The highest spirit of the party replied at once : " Good God, no ! We don't wish to see anything of the sort. *We're on leave !* " The truth about the English race is that whenever it goes to the theatre it considers itself to be on leave. Let me eat, drink, and go to *The Merry Widow* for to-morrow I may drop down dead—runs through the mind of every Englishman as he fingers his dress tie. But what the Englishman thinks about the theatre has never been of the slightest importance, because the Englishman does not go to the theatre in any considerable numbers. It is the Englishwoman who rings up Keith Prowse, and haven't they got anything better for Thursday fortnight than the middle of the fourth row of stalls, and are they quite sure that darling Sir Gerald will be playing that night, and has dearest Gladys really got some pretty frocks, and does the young gentleman at the other end of the 'phone think they would suit the speaker, she being fair and not slim and the other side of forty ? And so on and so forth. From time immemorial the British drama has been fashioned to please the flapper and the hen-witted—Shakespeare being the one honourable exception. But I do not believe that any flapper ever saw any play by Shakespeare or, seeing it, knew what it was about.

There are mornings when the sky hangs over me like a pall made of porridge, all my faculties are numb and the world seems to have lost definition. My breakfast-knife turns into india-rubber, and with a pointless fork I stuff my mouth with pieces of bacon made out of Berlin wool. I do not summon the doctor because he would be of no avail. What is the matter with me is that I must that evening at eight o'clock undergo a musical comedy. At ten o'clock the first act may possibly be over, and for two hours one will have endured the water-torture of the middle ages, the water being replaced by buckets of tepid whitewash. I will frankly say that in this matter I am not one with my kind. For all round about me I see eminent surgeons, barristers, judges, stockbrokers, drinking in the performance with eyes, ears and mouth, and applauding the wan efforts of Miss Tittlebat Twittermouse as though she were a Rachel, a Duse or a Bernhardt. I think that is the thing which annoys me most about musical comedy. I really do see red when I reflect how long and arduous must be the struggles of any player of talent. I see red when I remember Edith Evans's long fight against lack of appreciation, and when I realise the battle that is in front of so brilliant an artist as Martita Hunt. I see red when charming little noodles are hailed as terrific geniuses. And I suppose that as long as I am a dramatic critic I shall go on seeing red, and ultimately die of purple iridescence.

Is it a jaded appetite which suggests that the

Co-Optimists are possibly a shade less good than they used to be, or is it that they eschew the dead level, and like the temperamental golfer prefer alternations of two and ten to an unemotional series of sixes? Mr. Gilbert Childs is horribly bunkered in a number entitled "The Underworld of London after Dark," and no niblicity of humour could get him out of it. It is a long time before Mr. Austin Melford is allowed a glimpse of the pretty, though when once on the fairway he accomplishes the rest in par figures. Mr. Stanley Holloway is stymied by a song called "The Old Blue Boar," which is a ballad of unimpeachable banality, fragrant with the dust of ages. This capable artist should really be given some material more closely connected with the ironic scheme; one can hear ditties about the sands of Dee or Deptford at any ballad concert. Even Mr. Melville Gideon has too often to play out of the rough. Witness that piece of tiger-country in which a young lady simpers up-stage over a balustrade and a gramophone and repeats palely to the moon that which Mr. Gideon has already given out in the glare of the footlights. For a good half of the time the ground, so to speak, is under repair. And I suggest that as golfers are allowed to drop off ground under repair, so the Co-Optimists should not allow themselves to be dropped on to it.

But the rest of the show is excellent. One or two numbers are retained from the previous programme, and with excellent reason. Can anybody tire of the

ghost who, on gibbet-duty at the cross-roads, sees a motor-car go right through him? Even better, because it is legitimate comment, is the Proposed Ghost Union with four-hour haunts, and passing through walls and carrying head under arm to be considered skilled labour. Both Mr. Childs and Mr. Melford admirably reproduce what Prosper Mérimée's belated biographer has just called his "lunar incertitude." But far and away the best item is an extraordinarily good little sketch, entitled "Our Albert." In this one little scene Miss Doris Bentley, who plays the part of a Lancashire wife, has all the little chits and ninnies and noodles of musical comedy tied up in a bunch and beaten to a frazzle. No simpering in the moonlight here, no virginal swooning on the shirt-front of a tenor with a voice like a glue-pot. Mr. Gilbert Childs, as the husband wanly irate, does some capital acting now, and the pair execute a gloomy little dance which recalls the misadventurous side of Charlie Chaplin, and explains why the Lancashire mill-hand has to keep whippets or pigeons to make life bearable. In the slow ritual of these sad steps there is all the melancholy of goalless Saturday afternoons and the threnodic incitation of knurr and spell.

If there could be a better item than this it would be that one entitled "Melville Gideon on His Own." The phrase is something colloquial, but we know what it means. We know we are to have this fine little artist in single radiance, unaccompanied by moon or balustrade or bright little lady palely loitering. Mr.

Gideon by himself is immense, which, though a contradiction in terms, is nevertheless the sanest of pronouncements. With his crumpled, monkeyish mask, admirably assumed and hardly ever discarded, his unaffected ease, his crooning of sentimentalities in so low a voice that they reach what old-fashioned people still call the heart, his voluntary jazzing and guying of the same melodies so that they are purged of treacle, his knack of charming the tinniness out of a piano—all these qualities might entitle this artist to declare : " Le Co-Optimisme, c'est moi." Two things only prevent this : one is Mr. Gideon's modesty, and the other is Mr. Davy Burnaby, who on such a subject might have one or two words to say. He has more than one or two words on general matters to utter during the performance, and is as perfect a *compère* as shall be found on this side of the Channel. His imitation of a well-known jazz-conductor will bring balm to the souls of those who deem Chopin's Funeral March Sonata unsuited for performance on the bones, triangle, and a saxophone muted by a pound of carrots and a bowler hat.

December 5.

"Cochran's Revue (1926)"

Book by RONALD JEANS

London Pavilion

IT would be absurd not to recognise at once that the amount of taste, invention, ingenuity, and discrimination which have gone to the creation of this revue place it in the forefront of anything the lighter stage has seen for a good many years. Some of the dancing is as good as the best Russian ballet. But then it *is* Russian ballet, and it is not postulating too much to say that a thing is as good as itself. The music where it is old is adorable, and where it is new is never worse than dull ; some of the staging is as good as the best Komisarjevsky ; the dresses are as imaginative as they are sumptuous ; there is some tolerable comedy ; and there is Spinelly. The whole show bears witness to direction by a single mind. Now one knows quite well which parts of the show are to Mr. Cochran's own personal taste ; they are the bits one likes best oneself. This revue is a mountain of culture

cloudy of apex. But even Mont Cervin, craggy and nubbly with delights for climbers, has lower slopes for the delectation of less adventurous souls. I imagine Mr. Cochran, " soul-hydroptic with a sacred thirst," as Browning puts it, must from time to time have roundly snubbed his finer palate and taken an intentional pull at a recognisably commoner flagon.

There are at least four quite best things in this revue. First there is " The Tub," a Florentine ballet to Haydn's music, which makes us feel that the Medici are living round the corner. Then there is " Gigue," a ballet on classic themes by Bach, Handel, and Scarlatti. This is a magnificent jumble. The costumes are vaguely Louis XIV., the music is more or less Georgian, the only ornament on the stage is a Roman statue, the scenery consists of a bit of dirty yellow canvas upon which one who is obviously a modern draughtsman has hinted at something which he may some day turn into an archway or a window. Against this bit of haphazard mastery are the motionless bronze and the figure of Massine snatching from the air a pose which a sculptor would have frozen for all time. These present a piece of theatre which is entirely admirable. Let it be said here that in both these ballets, and indeed throughout the evening, Nemtchinova danced magnificently and wore clothes possessing which no Peri could have ever hankered after Paradise. Possibly the best thing of all is " The Masks," brilliant both in conception and execution. And last there is " Birdcage Walk," which takes us

back quite deliciously to the age of Mr. Crockford and Mr. Nash.

On the lower slopes there are such pleasurable scrambles as "Tahiti," which sets one wondering what the Polynesians are doing about the silk tax, "Southend-on-Sea," jolly enough to make one realise what a happy land is England to be able to afford such an impost, "The Roman Baths at Deauville" inviting us to share Mr. Podsnap's view of French manners, "Aladdin" which takes the advertising bull by the horns and milks it as it were this year's dairy champion. "Les Aromes de Coty" to the subtle perfume of Debussy's *Plus que Lente* sends my lady's nose questing after fragrances for which Cleopatra would have given whole provinces and thrown in Antony as make-weight. These things are done as well as their lesser genius permits, and in them are incorporated the healthy English charm of Miss Annie Croft, the chubby virtuosity of Miss Peggy, the Spanish *fougue* of her partner, Mr. Cortez, and the altogether amazing ballroom accomplishment of Mr. Billy Bradford.

Foremost amongst the comedians is Mr. Thesiger. Now Mr. Thesiger is a very good actor indeed, whose temporary loss the legitimate stage can ill afford. He does well in the present show, yet I venture to think that it is not good for us that an actor should spend too much of his time in deploying too little of his talent. Mr. Cochran has announced his intention of abandoning revue in favour of musical comedy, which can only be

to the advantage of that sad art. But let him return Mr. Thesiger to the legitimate stage with appropriate compliments—we will provide the thanks. Miss Hermione Baddeley also does well, and is the life and soul of sketches which exist solely for her justification. There are one or two numbers which might with advantage be cut. One is "Missing Links," which is a savage skit upon late-comers. Here an unfortunate allusion is made to the managerial practice of announcing that the interest of the play begins with the rise of the curtain. May a weary critic protest that the interest of too many plays begins only with the fall of those admirable folds? Two other items which might go are the "Head Over Heels" shop scene, which is quite wantonly dreary, and "I'm Crazy on the Charleston," of which the music is more depressing than threnody, dirge or coronach.

Remains Spinelly, now making her first bow to a London audience. Let me say at once that the adoring Parisians are right to take no notice of the thews, bulk, and big assemblance of a diseuse. Spinelly is the smallest parcel of wit that ever invaded these shores, and may rightfully claim allegiance from all subjects of Queen Mab. She can hardly be said to act, or to dance in the splendiferous, opulent sense, and she does not make even a pretence at singing. It is rather that she communes fantastically with herself. Fancies are spun in that cobwebby brain which are too near gossamer for gross utterance; these she will translate by play of the hands or a flick of a nose ending

abruptly like a cliff interrupted by laughing seas. Or you might say that her eyes' sparkle is like a jeweller's window in the Rue de la Paix. Perhaps her best moment is in the Deauville scene, when she discards a mantle at which hundreds of dressmakers must have stitched night and day, and reveals a *négligée* invented by a Beardsley for a Titania. It is in this rapturous costume, held together by a handul of diamonds, that the diva proposes to return to her native foam. In other words, she is going down to the sea to bathe. Was ever impertinence so pertinent? If there be such a thing as a kingdom of the *chic*, one can be perfectly certain who reigns. Is it suggested that our theatres are too big for her? Then must we build bandboxes.

May 2.

"The Charlot Show of 1926"

By RONALD JEANS

Prince of Wales Theatre

ONE of the difficulties of criticism is to rid oneself of personal bias. Indeed, it is doubtful whether this demon can ever be completely exorcised. My own private and particular bugbear is that I cannot put up with waste, and that vacancy delights me not. To be present while the talents of incredibly perfect revue artists like Miss Binnie Hale, Mr. Claude Hulbert and Mr. Jack Buchanan are frittered away upon perfectly incredible banalities first dispirits me and then fires me with a blaze of economic fury. Surely this is unforgivable waste? And yet may there not be another aspect? Put three such talented players on to the stage, deprive them of material, and bid them amuse an audience for three hours—may not the result be the quintessential extract of personality? Do you not in this way get the Binnieness of Hale and the Claudity of Hulbert? Are you not taking your Buchanan neat? Or you might put it that the vacuity

of musical comedy is really the "intenser day" of Shelley's wave, in which personality reaches a definition and significance unattainable in the dry, blurred light of reason. Years ago in *Punch* Du Maurier poked fun at Lady Gorgius Midas refusing a synopsis of *La Dame aux Camèlias* on the grounds that she had come to see the acting and had no desire to understand the play. The tendency in spectacular entertainments is to go a step further, and, by eliminating interest in the acting by the simple expedient of providing nothing for the actor to act, concentrate attention singly upon the player. Well, this is no new thing. How many virtuosos in the fiddling line ever perform anything of musical interest? How many coloratura singers colour anything except imbecility? Have we not all in our time booked seats for a world-actress in the hope of a new, splurgy Sardou and in the secret fear of being fobbed off with *Phèdre?*

Let us, then, not indulge in too many shrugs of horror at the people who like a big musical affair principally for the people who play in it. Yet those of us who, even in a light entertainment, are all for the play and consider actors only as the play's interpreters, do upon occasion come into our own. *Charlot's Revue* contains several admirable actors who are interpreters first, last, and all the time. There is Mr. Herbert Mundin, who refuses to obtrude his Mundinity, and out of some invisible wardrobe dips for personalities as Lamb's old actor, whose name so closely resembled his, dipped for faces. Mr. Mundin will forgive me if I say that he

was always a clever comedian who has now improved out of knowledge. His study of the old cab-driver has all the humour and pathos of Chevalier without the exaggeration. Whether he is portraying comic villain, Yankee policeman (film variety), gentleman's gentleman, or liftboy, he is careful to preserve that little touch of character which differentiates the fine art of burlesque from the grosser one of mere clowning.

Then take Miss Jessie Matthews, who, I am assured, is not yet out of her teens. It was obvious as soon as this little actress came on that she possessed freshness and natural high spirits in keeping with her tip-tilted nose, wide smile, and china-blue, saucer eyes. One thought of the phrase found by Sarcey for Réjane on her first appearance—a "*petite frimousse éveillée*" and "an air too wideawake for the house of Molière." But an actress can hardly be too wideawake for the house of Charlot, and of this fact Miss Matthews seemed admirably well aware. She sang a clever little song with a complete semblance of spontaneity, and danced as one delighted to be dancing. But even so, I was not prepared for her admirable French maid, whom she presented with all the *verve* and distinction and sense of fun of Spinelly at her best. It must be remembered, too, that in giving us a French *soubrette* Spinelly is pretending to be what she is, whereas Miss Matthews succeeds in being to the life what she very obviously isn't. This little sketch revealed talent of a singularly high order, and I suggest that it was a pity to bring this young player on again to sing, in a scena of

complete mediocrity and a *négligée* which Mrs. Micawber might have worn, an utterly dull song.

The excellence of this revue is proved by the fact that almost its best item is one in which neither of the two artists mentioned above appears. This is a skit upon broadcasting-talks entitled "Atmospherics." Here a lecture by a health crank gets mixed up with one by an explorer of sorts and another by a tram-driver in the employ of the Manchester Corporation. The results are not to be described in print. It has been suggested that this scene ought to be censored. If this should unfortunately happen I hope to be given the hint, so that I may attend again before the cuts are made. The whole scene is, in my opinion, an uproarious affair which is entirely healthy. There is more decency, some poet should remark, in honest doubtfulness than in half the permitted, sniggering creeds. Rabelais carries his pardon with him wherever he goes. Where everybody is so good as in this sketch it is invidious to make distinctions. Nevertheless, I shall distinguish, and point to Mr. Allan Macbeth's Major Knapsack, who is like a composite cartoon in which Bairnsfather, Low and Kapp have held the pencil in turns. From time to time Mr. Anton Dolin dances beautifully, and his skit at the expense of the Russian ballet passes triumphantly the test for true parody—that it sends you back to the original with greater pleasure.

But however good the acting, singing and dancing, the success of any revue depends in the last resort upon

the " book," which in this case is excellent throughout. One of the most amusing scenes is a burlesque of Italian opera where the entirely felicitous idea is hit upon of first performing the music of the sextet in " Lucia " and then speaking the words in cold blood. One thinks that the idea might be usefully expanded. How would it be to blare out the tune of that chorus in *Sunny* which begins with the word " Who ? " and then let us hear in all its simple virtue the rest of that complicated interrogatory ? But the book of this revue is good even when it is spinning its own fun and not finding it where others unconsciously put it. Mr. Charlot apparently believes in Opie's recipe. One should add that the brains with which he has mixed his entertaining colours are those of Mr. Ronald Jeans.

October 17.

"Palladium Pleasures"

A Revue

Palladium

Enfin Malherbe vint. It is possible that the patrons of this popular house may not know Boileau's apothegm, but it is certain that they are familiar with its spirit. At what point in the revue will the Misses Lorna and Toots Pounds put in an appearance? This was quickly settled on Wednesday night, when as early as the third number the band struck up a Spanish number, and *enfin ces dames vinrent.*

Since these two artists would appear to be the mainstay of these popular revues, it may be worth while suggesting first, that they should be used in parts for which their considerable talents fit them, and second, that they should not be asked to do that which must be impermissible for any artist. Let me explain. There is a song-scena entitled "Mothers of the World." Six stained-glass niches contain each a mother and infant. Each mother croons a ditty to her child, after which an upper curtain, being removed, reveals Miss Toots Pounds in apotheosis and the garb of a nun, surrounded

by adoring angels. One remembers that that great artist, Mr. Balieff, had some difficulty in persuading the Censor that a Nativity scene could be introduced with propriety into the middle of a light revue. I suggest that the adumbrations in this song-scena, which from the æsthetic point of view is deplorable, are not permissible. A later scene shows Miss Lorna Pounds generously filling the uniform of a sergeant in the Grenadier Guards and endeavouring to support the burden of an old and familiar patriotic song—a task which on Wednesday night, at least, was totally beyond this artist's powers. Her voice on this occasion, either through fatigue, overstrain, or some other reason, was hardly existent. Yet Miss Pounds has considerable mastery in the art of burlesque, and her clowning remains as good as ever. But she would be well advised to abandon juvenile and heroic *rôles*. Since criticism should be constructive, I propose that Miss Toots should relinquish the " ensky'd and sainted " and tread firm earth as the sergeant whose song she would sing so well, and that further opportunities should be provided for Miss Lorna in that grotesque realm of which she is such a mistress.

The rest is all praise. By far the best of many good things is the revival of some of the old songs of Mr. Leslie Stuart. Let it be said that these well-remembered ditties are really national songs. They have penetrated to, and become part of the consciousness of, many members of the audience who can never have heard them at the time when they were " all the

rage." It was not only the old fogeys in the house who took up the songs and sang them without incitation. After homage had been paid to the "Lily of Laguna," a back-cloth went up to reveal the Pretty Maidens of 1899 with their frock-coated, top-hatted swains. What an elegant world that seems to us now, when a gentleman never dreamed of proclaiming "Yes, Sir, she's My Baby!" and the lady in her picture hat and long flowing dress modestly opined that since she must love someone she might as well love her gentleman friend. This song was rapturously received. Then came "Soldiers of the Queen," well rendered by the chorus, and really quite moving with the clarion-call of the trumpets cutting nobly through the web of sound.

Another capital item is the all-British ballet entitled "A Flutter in the Dovecote." The curtain rises on a group of doves, whom the principal Lady Dove warns of the approach of a male admirer. The male bird, after flirting with each in turn, chooses, strange to say, the principal Lady Dove. Now an Eagle appears. Whereupon Mr. Anton Dolin aggravates his gestures so that he may be said to roar as violently as any dove in Corioli. The Eagle disappears, and alone Mr. Dolin has done it. The ballet is charmingly danced, though dramatically perhaps it does not amount to very much.

Mr. Billy Merson, amusing throughout, is perhaps at his best in a very cruel skit upon "The Last of Mrs. Cheyney," hitting very hard at that mood of non-

chalance which is held to-day to be the sign of great acting. The satire here bites deep, and the fun is greatest when Mr. Merson, proposing refreshment to his fair antagonist, offers not champagne, but winkles. Miss Lorna Pounds is also very amusing with her simulations of wideawake experience coquetting with aghast innocence. I venture to think that we see too little of that clever comedian, Mr. John Kirby, who is in all sorts of ways a most admirable actor. The chorus is good throughout, whether it be engaged in presenting Crusaders or snakes, and the whole show goes with admirable precision. What it lacks is coherence, the numbers having no more relation to one another than the dips in a lucky bag. There is an obvious absence of any assembling spirit, for it is impossible to conceive that the mind which encouraged the little ballet should have sanctioned that regrettable song-scena about the world's mothers. But on the whole it is a very good show which will not lack enthusiasts.

February 28.

"Black Birds"

A Revue

London Pavilion

WHEN Hazlitt wrote his famous essay in praise of the Indian jugglers, he troubled his head no jot as to whether they were white or black or red or yellow. They were just supreme artists doing "what none of us could do to save our lives, if we were to take our whole lives to do it in." I have never seen dancing to compare with that given by these *Black Birds*. The meanest member of the chorus puts into her work the virtuosity of a Rosenthal circumventing a twelfth Hungarian rhapsody, using, in my judgment, more ease and naturalness. After all it is comparatively easy not to perform a piano Concerto; whereas these dancers could not keep still if they would.

I am afraid to say what I think about the three male dancers lest I be accused of extravagance. Let it just be stated, then, that in this particular job we can no more find anybody to beat them than we could find somebody to knock out Jack Johnson. Whereupon, I suppose, we shall have to meet objections beginning,

" But hang it all, old chap, these black fellahs, don'cher know. . . ." And the argument continues on the lines laid down by Hamlet's Aunt at the dinner-party. " We see (black) blood in a nose, and we know it. We meet with it in a chin, and we say, ' There it is ! That's (black) Blood ! ' " For myself I have exceedingly little patience with arguments about the colour-line in general. Doubtless our national poet meant well when he said that " the regimental bhisti, for all 'is dirty 'ide, was white, clear white, inside." But what should we think if we found Mr. Rabindranath Tagore writing of some scouring of the Waterloo Road that for all his pallid hide he was black, clear black, inside ? And when it comes to the question of public entertainers, be they boxers or jugglers or dancers or what-not—I cannot see that it matters whether they are gamboge, cerise, or burnt sienna. It may even be that the whole continent of Africa is but an extension of the Tottenham Court Road, and that all its dusky sons, like Calverley's victims—

> Plunge after shocking lives
> Razors and carving knives
> Into their gizzards.

After all it is their own affair, and what any public performer does when he is not performing never has been anybody else's business. Personally, I am convinced that our visitors go home to a bowl of bread and milk and early bed. They are athletes in training.

Miss Florence Mills is a superb artist, whether she is imitating the epileptic frenzy of a witch-dance or

indulging in her native melancholy. The notes she warbles are real wood notes, and you would say that her voice is untrained. Untrained because of its astonishing facility. This singer has taken her high C and come down again while more ponderous primadonnas are still debating the ascent. You may say either that hers is the "quaintest, richest carol of all the singing throats," or that she is like a dove of the firwood "crooning through the coo." I don't suppose Mr. Cochran will mind which choice you make after paying your guinea. And if it should happen that any American *diseuse* of authentic whiteness would like to learn how to sing a sentimental song with restraint . . . But I grow foolish.

September 19.

Entertainments

"Romance"

A Play by EDWARD SHELDON

Playhouse

HOW great or even good an actress, exactly, is Miss Doris Keane? It is very difficult to tell since this artist takes all reasonable care to see that the material essential to any judgment on the point is not forthcoming. Who could possibly have imagined that after having scored an immense personal success in what must be, all things considered, the worst among the world's competent plays this actress would, ten years later, again trot out the old war-horse and again hoist herself into the saddle? But the question is a foolish one. One ought to have known that this was exactly what anybody having the pretentions to be considered a great actress would do. Great actresses, even American ones, are like British bull-dogs. Let them get their teeth into a good part and there is no power in either continent, in the heavens above or the water between them, to make these ladies let go. And one supposes that la Cavallini is a great part. It is at least one of those agglomerations of trickery which great actresses have always held to constitute great drama.

The remarkable thing about *Romance* is not that it ultimately succeeded, but that it should have failed initially. Think of all the good things with which it is crammed ! First there is the prima donna whose intonation is alleged to be as pure as her private life is the reverse. This is always a sure card to play, doubled as it is with the delicious uncertainty as to cause and effect. Then there is Thomas Armstrong, the young minister tortured by the spiritual imperfections of Creation's feminine masterpiece. To the clergyman the opera-singer is fairer than a thousand virtuous stars ; flaming like Jupiter when he appeared to hapless Semele, Thomas will be the monarch of wanton Cavallini's azured arms, and none but she shall be his lawful, wedded spouse. Later the lady proclaims herself unmoved by her lover's picture of Darby and Joan, conscious at their golden wedding of having striven to make the world better. La Cavallini does not belong to the Stephen Phillips school. She cares nothing for " beautiful friendship tried by sun and wind." Neither is she of Mr. Drinkwater's world, and the last thing we can impute to her is the Queen of Scotland's desire " to see strong children about me, to play with an easy festival mind, to walk the evenings in peace." La Cavallini cares for none of these things. Love to her is a star shining fitfully over life's troubled sea. Less romantically, departure to fulfil a Russian contract is the time, her boudoir the place, and the good-looking young parson the man.

The third act contains the *scene-à-faire* beloved of all

dramatists with well-regulated minds. La Cavallini, after two hours of desperate angling, has landed her ingenuous fish. And now comes the great surprise. Being hooked, the catch insists on coming to shore, but she who has so successfully plied rod and line decides otherwise. It is the opera-singer who will hook it, even as far as the Wilds of Tartary, but first throwing back her fish into the waters of passionate purity. That intimate door at which we have been knocking for the greater part of the evening opens to reveal a church, and where an alcove was expected we find cloisters. Our romance turns out to be ordinary theatrical magic, and the piece a conjuror's hat productive of sentimental rabbits, abnegation by the yard, and flowers of speech made up into bouquets of imperishable banality. Are we tempted at Cavallini's supreme moment of renunciation to hark back to the classic heroines? We think of Phèdre's

> Et la mort, à mes yeux dérobant la clarté,
> Rend au jour qu'ils souilloient toute sa pureté,

and then reflect that it is not death but the fulfilling of a contract in Russia which is to restore purity to the soiled daylight of Washington Square. *Romance; or the Life and Loves of La Toshca* is the full title to this piece.

Yet on its own level and after making allowances, the play is an enormously competent piece of work, though it may not be uncritical to suggest that the level is a low one and that the allowances to be made are

considerable. I repeat that the most astonishing thing about it was its initial failure. A minor surprise is the retention of the prologue and epilogue, which in intention and craftsmanship are so much inferior to the main body of the piece. Both are entirely unnecessary, and should be cut. If there is any purpose in them it can only be in the epilogue, which demonstrates that a mistress of *bel canto* can retain the habit of singing off the note for forty years without losing her grip upon the affections of a wildly adoring, wildly undiscriminating public.

This good example of naïve, old-fashioned play-making permits an actress all those accomplishments which have nothing to do with great acting but which no great actress can afford to do without. Note the deft, witty way in which Miss Doris Keane utilises those amazing crinolines, luring her tassel-gentle with one hand and with the other teaching the buoyant envelope discretion. Note the admirable use of the stage and the expressive gestures with which she contrives to indicate a quality of beauty which the author has not allowed her to stress in the words. Note that clever broken accent and subtle suggestion of an opera-singer's mentality—school of Donizetti, Bellini, and early Verdi. Miss Keane has moments of quietism which show that in a more sensible part she may very well be a good as distinguished from a great actress. To play the whole of the first act in half-tone was in itself a feat, corroborated later on by the refusal to overplay the big emotional scene ; and the recital concern-

ing an earlier love affair was actually moving. The only time when I thought Miss Keane overplayed was when she took her calls at the end ; it is perhaps not unlawful to suggest that in acknowledging applause bestowed upon a one thousand and forty-second performance one should not imply emergence from a martyr's trial. This little criticism apart Miss Keane's performance seemed to me to be excellent. There was no heart in it, but then there could not be. It has not been my good fortune to see this actress in any other play. I confess that I should now like to see her tackle Madame Arcadina in *The Sea-Gull*. A performance of Tchehov's real-life actress would tell us a great deal about Miss Keane's art which the sawdust in Cavallini leaves undetermined.

It would be difficult to exaggerate the value to this piece of Mr. Owen Nares, who played the Rev. Thomas quite unimaginably well. Mr. Cecil Humphreys contributed his own dignity to a part which with any less tact might have been ridiculous, Miss Stella Rho was responsible for some much-needed humour, and Miss Agnes Thomas stood fast as a rock. There was considerable enthusiasm at the end. For the play contains more than enough glamour to enchant those who in their own minds have made absolute the divorce between Romance and Reality.

October 31.

"Aladdin"

A Pantomime

Palladium

WHAT is the difference between producing and staging? Normally the terms are held to be synonymous, the one as much as the other. In the matter of the Palladium pantomime the programme assigns the first to Mr. Harry Day and the second to Mr. Charles Henry. To single minds pantomime-æsthetic may be a shy, elusive art; to bifurcated genius it is obviously a comfortable commodity to be hauled about the stage by blocks, pulleys, and the willing arms of scene-shifters. In *Aladdin* there is no question of *chinoiserie*, of a tea-cup princess who to misquote Gautier's lady "à present est en Chine." At present and datelessly, immemorially, she inhabits the Edgware Road. You know how the verse goes on, how this dainty bit of ware lives with her old parents in a porcelain tower by the Yellow River, "où sont les cormorans." There are more than cormorants in Mr. Gulliver's China, including dancers of the Charleston. His Emperor is a Pope of the Renaissance, seated under a canopy which Mr. Charles Ricketts might have designed for Joan's Dauphin, and ogling an imperial washerwoman of a candour indistinguish-

able from that of Sardou's Sans-Gêne. Truly the centuries kiss and commingle.

Mr. Charles Austin's Widow Twankey is a beauty whose summer has not held out against the wrackful siege of battering days. Or you might put it that she is a blonde no longer preferred. Her type sets you questing for images. Shall we say her head's a work of art like that of Henley's barmaid ? Yet set upon it the hat of wilting plumes in which she sings of " Alice's House " and we get a faithful presentment of the Lord Mayor's Coachman. Again, like Helen of Troy in the prose-history, this beauty has a " rolling hawk's eye and a smiling wanton countenance." Can this be the face which has laundered a thousand slips ? But the sublimated washerwoman knows her business, and is *au fait* equally with riches " beyond the dreams of arrowroot," and with Chelsea's poverty in the matter of goals.

Miss Clarice Mayne pursues Beauty relentlessly, and has a song Shelleyesque in intention about climbing highest mountains and swimming deepest rivers in search of a love alternately poised and submerged. The Princess of Miss Violet Essex is coy and oncoming as the text demands, and Mr. Bransby Williams will undoubtedly be better by and by. Is the material supporting these artists good enough ? The children, who are the true critics, signified by their crowing that they deemed it sufficient. I must not forget to add that Sumptuosity was present in person.

December 26.

"The Old Music Hall"

ALHAMBRA

THERE is a great deal of fun in reviving old memories. I have no doubt they did it in Greek and Roman days, although the fashion in this country seems to have received fresh impetus with the generation which could vaguely remember Cremorne. You will remember how Mr. Galsworthy's old Heythorp went on about four-in-hands and Mario and Grisi. To-day we have taken to sentimentalising over the jingling hansom. Piccadilly without the roar of the motor 'buses or the scream of the sky signs, the old Empire, Marie Lloyd. All these things we see, alas, in the mind's eye only. This week at the Alhambra Miss Kate Carney re-creates an old vision in a manner which is palpable to feeling as to sight. She presents the past in the round and is herself a very noble and satisfying monument to it. This highly talented artist is probably the last of the great *lionnes comiques*. If she should retire, which one hopes will not be for a long time yet, there must disappear from our stage all that grand manner which was the sum of so many small perfections. Kate Carney, like all the great in her kind, can do absolutely nothing and yet

hold the stage, or execute a trivial gesture of the hand or meaningless flick of the heel and rivet your attention as upon something vital. Her superbity is such that you can no more take your eyes off her than you could off a Roman gladiatoress.

Miss Carney deals authentically in all that material which our puny modern æsthetes deem it amusing to reproduce in their thin, cold-blooded way. By throwing a scarf over her be-diamonded person she will ask you to believe that she is an East End widow. From the wings there emerges a piping child of ten who in shrill tones declares :—

> Mother, I love you ; I can work for two.
> Don't let those tears roll down your cheek ;
> I'll bring my wages to you every week.
> Mother, I love you ; what more can a loving son do ?
> You have worked for me a long, long time,
> So now I can work for you.

Now what on earth is the good of chattering about high art in connection with such matter as this ? Did not the thunders of applause indicate the presence of hundreds of sons and daughters who know of their own experience the matter of this ditty ? That being so, all other babble about it is purely impertinent. Are there in an audience lovers who have quarrelled ? If so, then I commend to them a lyric which may not possess the matchless beauty of the best of Tennyson's, but has at least as much sense :—

> Are we to part like this, Bill ;
> Are we to part this way ?
> Who's it to be, her or me ?
> Don't be afraid to say.

If ever it's over between us,
  Don't ever pass me by ;
True friends we'll be
  For the sake of the days gone by.

To the makers of *vers libres* I recommend "The Mouth-Organ Brigade" as model. It goes as follows :—

All round the houses we'll roam each night,
Kids all hurrahing when we are playing
Tanner Mouth-Organs ; they sound all right,
For they knock all your big brass bands.

But Miss Carney's best song is entitled "Alice's 'Ouse." It appears that the singer, having been "treated" by the highest in the land, desires to "return the compliment." So :

Let's all go round to Alice's 'ouse ;
Alice's 'ouse is like a Palis', is Alice's 'ouse.
  Carpets on the Floor,
  A Knocker on the Door.
I've never seen so many people knock at the door before.
Free and Easy, Bright and Breezy,
When you get in they say it's go as you pleas'y.
So let's all go round to Alice's 'ouse ;
Alice's 'ouse is like a Palis', is Alice's 'ouse.

Hear this—sung to a rollicking tune which puts jazz in its proper place—and you are back again in the palmy days of the Oxford and the Tivoli.

October 17.

"Aloma"

A Melodrama by J. B. HYMER and LE ROY CLEMENS

Adelphi Theatre

LIKE Mrs. Merdle who, the Dickensian will remember, was "vastly pastoral," I myself am vastly Polynesian. Unveracity in its proper place, which is melodrama, need revolt no one; and probably Aloma and her dusky sisters of this sea-girt Bohemia are as true as the Musette and Mimi of that other savage quarter. Art has many mansions, and there is room for Gauguin's pictures, Conrad's romances, Louis Becke's stories, Kingsley's strictures upon "mammy-palaver"—didn't Amyas shoot two sailors who went native?—and this Adelphi pantomime. The story will doubtless prove justly popular, being compounded of *Madam Butterfly*, *The Geisha*, and *White Cargo*, with a dash of Ramon Novarro in *The Passion Flower*. Add two dissolute Englishmen, one of whom reforms, a wilting English lady, a *deus ex machina* in the form of a hungry shark, bevies of dark-skinned beauties annihilating, you might say, all that's made to a brown thought in a brown shade.

number of gentlemen in the garb of Turkish bath attendants, a voluminous duenna whose business it is to keep the sexes apart or bring them together—one cannot quite determine which—and a thunderstorm to make Mr. Dean look to his Schwabe-Haseit installation—conjure up all these things and the reader will see that no romantic expense has been spared.

Then there is Aloma herself, a young lady with as nice a taste in sentiment as your composer of drawing-room ballads. " Aloma will soon learn to forget Mr. Bob," says that hero. To which the maiden replies : " Aloma will forget Mr. Bob when the waters of the lagoon melt away, and the sun and stars go out," and, we presume, the sands of the desert grow cold. Mr. Francis Lister plays the reclaimed young man with all imaginable distinction, and the same may be said of Mr. Cronin Wilson's simulation of the villain. Some day, perhaps, this pleasant actor will be vouchsafed to us right up to the end of a piece instead of falling to apache knife or shark's tooth at the moment when his polished brutality nears its apogee. Mr. Clay Clement plays very attractively as an untutored Polynesian warbling his native wood-notes into the ear of Miss Aloma. As that self-possessed divinity, Miss Vivienne Osborne gives a performance nubbly with delight, like the most toothsome nut-milk chocolate.

May 23.

Films

Three Films

"YPRES"

"INDIA"

"COLLEGE DAYS"

PHILHARMONIC HALL. POLYTECHNIC. CAPITOL

JANUARY being the breathing time of year with dramatic critics, the season is convenient for a glance at the sister drama. Can it be that exorbitant ladies couched on leopard skins still read *The Rosary*, while loin-girt Nubians offer libations of sparkling Burgundy? And so last week I made a little tour, beginning with two halls where this sort of thing is seldom to be looked for. The first was the Philharmonic Hall, where the film called *Ypres* was being shown in its entirety under the auspices of the Army Council. This seemed to me to be excellent in detail, though in general scope falling considerably below the standard reached in *With Allenby in Palestine*. The peculiar merit of that film was that the spectator could obtain from it an excellent idea not only of the strategy of that campaign, but of its relative importance. But though a sub-title states that Ypres was the key to the Channel ports, this is insufficiently demonstrated in

the way of diagram. In the Allenby film the general map was unrolled at regular intervals ; in the present picture attention is singly concentrated upon a circle of twenty miles diameter, having Ypres as its centre. One is hardly allowed to see the importance of the wood for the valour of the defending trees ; and, indeed, for the picture as a reconstruction of feats of heroism there can be nothing but admiration.

Can it be that the film is lacking, not in the way of lively or more pathetic anecdote, but of dramatic content and spiritual message ? Presumably such a picture is intended to do more than reopen old wounds—it were intolerable else. The friend with me had lost two brothers at Ypres. He said : " The old folks talked of coming to see this, but I shan't let them." The point is that this picture is too obviously a photographic reconstruction of heroisms ending in death, and too little the embodiment of whatever meaning is to be found in this overwhelming tragedy. If this film were supposed to do no more than brace the mind of the coming generation to feats of arms, to act as a pictorial version of the war speeches from *Henry V.*, then frankly one might hold that it should not be shown. One feels that there has been an effort to disengage from the turmoil something of tragic purification. Witness the throwing on the screen of those words of Laurence Binyon in which we recognise the healing power of a Greek chorus. But there is not enough of spiritual transposition to take the pain out of the picture. It is not easy to see how this could have been

achieved. One suggests, as an example, that some of the over-long passages showing the physical effects of gas might have been replaced by a picture of the memorial erected to the Canadians who were the first sufferers, the simple inscription of which has almost the power of the Greek " Stranger, depart and tell the Lacedemonians that we lie here obeying their laws." This monument is the soul of those who fell ; the picture shows their mortal agonies.

The title of the film shown at the Polytechnic—*India To-day*—is misleading, since what is meant is Missionary Work in India to-day. To people who are lukewarm about proselytism this film will not make great appeal ; to the zealous it will offer many attractions. It is interesting up to a point, and one is curious to know what the heathen can think about a faith which must seem to them to be largely compounded of soap and water, physical drill, hygiene, gymkhanas, sewing meetings, and sales of work. After a time one became a little wearied of those processions of Girl Guides with black faces and white pinafores, and one reflected that that Bishop was perhaps not altogether misguided who wrote :—

> If I were a Cassowary,
> On the plains of Timbuctoo,
> I would eat a missionary,
> Coat and bands and hymn-book, too !

The first half of the programme at the Capitol was taken up by one of those films which make pointlessness sensible to feeling as to sight. Two young women fall

out of a boat. One is drowned, but the luckier possesses herself of the other's "grip" and gets safely to shore. The bag being opened, it appears that the owner was to share the hand and fortune of a New York millionaire. So the survivor posts off to New York, and finding the fellow gone for a holiday poses as his wife. The millionaire returns and takes her to his arms, Providence having chosen skilfully in this matter of drowning and sparing. Miss Norma Shearer is very pretty, and could probably act if her material were actable. In the tragic parts of this nonsense she looks like Mercia about to enter the arena, but it is the actress's public which lionises her.

Yet one would say that even this tedious nonsense is worth enduring for the sake of *College Days*, which is good throughout. The idea of the young man who bases his notions about university life upon slap-stick pictures about universities is altogether excellent. Speedy's attempts at ingratiation are such as might be imagined by a Kipps turned Cyrano; they fail, and he is quickly accepted as the college butt. His only hope is the inter-university football match. Speedy is as big a mutt at that game as at everything else, and being allowed to go round with the water imagines himself to be a substitute. Here the film rises to the utmost heights of Hentyism, the fates ordaining that he shall play, and in the last minute win the match in the presence of half America. The last quarter of an hour of this picture is really thrilling. Mr. Harold Lloyd is obviously an athlete trained to the last ounce,

and puts an immense amount of physical energy into the cleverly contrived situations. But in my humble judgment he has neither humour nor pathos, but only spectacles ; and to watch him is to realise once more the genius of Mr. Chaplin.

So ended my little tour. No sign of any Nubian, not even in India.

January 10.

Some War Films

"Mademoiselle from Armentières"

"Mare Nostrum"

"His Pal's Wife"

Marble Arch Pavilion. New Gallery.

New Gaiety Kinema

LAST week being Armistice Week, I shall, with the reader's leave, say something about war films and their spirit. It is surprising that the makers and renters of films do not employ what one might conveniently call a mob-taster, or audience-diviner, whose duty it should be to mingle with us in our hundreds and sense our corporate feeling as to this and that "feature." Long acquaintance of audiences enables the expert to feel their pulse with a fair amount of accuracy; witness the libraries, who rarely make mistakes. I was present at the last show of *The Big Parade*, which, it will be remembered, was divided into two parts, the love affair and the battle scenes. Judging strictly from what I gathered as to the temper of the house, I am tempted to ask whether producers of war pictures have not largely miscalculated the taste

and predisposition of their audiences. There was not, there could not be, any love interest in such reconstructions of plain fact as *Ypres*, *Zeebrugge*, *Mons*. Yet the interest of audiences was not lessened. Are film makers right in thinking that audiences are necessarily repelled by imaginative interpretation of the war, and will only consent to the battlefield if it is shown as the setting of a personal romance ?

" And thus while Europe was rent in twain two hearts remained whole." This caption, taken from an actual film, puts what I mean into a nutshell. Scenario writers do not seem able to distinguish, or to credit audiences with distinguishing, the big thing from the little. They treat the European conflagration as though it were a candle to the bonfire of two hearts. They have always done this in matters outside the war, and cannot get out of the rut ; even in *The Sea Beast*, which is the screen version of *Moby Dick*, they cannot tell the story of the whale without a whale of a love story. The *clou* to the first half of *The Big Parade* was the scene in which the French girl tried to detach her lover from the moving column. The extravagance and distortion were here, I think, resented by the audience. There is an exactly similar scene in *Mademoiselle from Armentières*. The first half of this picture was again purely sentimental, and again one felt that attention was being frittered away upon the inessential. Now the finest scenario for any war film was written long ago by Shakespeare in *Henry V*. Consider what we should feel if any film director were

to treat Henry's love affair with Katharine as the major issue, and Agincourt, St. Crispin, and St. George, and the talk with Williams, the common soldier, as minor decorations. That in effect is what the producer of war films does. In *His Pal's Wife* a soldier, comforting the wife of a dead comrade, is forced by village tittle-tattle into marrying her. Upon which the dead man turns up again. "Such," blares out the caption, "were the tangled threads woven by the God of War."

Are these inversions and disproportions essential? I think not, and suggest that proof that they are unnecessary is to be found in the films under discussion. In *The Big Parade* the tension of the house was undoubtedly at its most taut in the scene in which the American soldier vowed to avenge the death of his friend, yet with his bayonet at the throat of the already dying German found himself unable to drive the weapon home and took to comforting a fellow-creature in his agony. If there is any such thing as the brotherhood of man, and if the spirit of humanity be above war, then we have confirmation here. At this point the film took what one might almost call a leap into the upper atmosphere, in which the poet asked why, since there is only one sky to cover them all, there should be conflict among peoples. In *Mademoiselle from Armentières* there is a shrinking youngster torn from the nursery into the bloody lap of war. If one is any judge, that which most impressed the audience was not the manly hero's love affair with a French waitress,

but the weakling's drawing upon the reserves of spiritual strength presented through the medium and succour of an older soldier. The latter keeps the boy going with the familiar strain of " Old Soldiers Never Die," and it is not the youngster who is killed. If it be true that in these two pictures the presentation of spiritual resolution moved the audience quite as much as the palpable deeds of valour, and very much more than the course of the sentimental love stories of which the essays in courage were the permitted embroideries, then one would say that the time is ripe for films which shall rise above the anecdote, pathetic or lively, to the embodiment of war's tragedy and the imaginative disengaging of its meaning. I believe earnestly and sincerely that the time is ripe for such films. It remains to be said that *Mademoiselle from Armentières*, besides giving us a glimpse of what a war film might be, is excellent on the plane in which it has been conceived. There is obviously a growing inclination on the part of the public for the graphic representation of war scenes. One attributes this to two things, the passing of time which makes bearable that which earlier was unbearable, and the new interest of the young generation.

Mare Nostrum is a good, straightforward Secret Service drama, remarkable principally for a scene in which the heroine, a beautiful German spy, is shot wearing the furs and jewels which she declares to be her uniform. The screen is really learning to do something by suggestion, since we note that in the scene of

execution the horror resides not in the lined-up platoon but in the coffin half concealed in the Red Cross waggon of which we are allowed a fleeting glimpse. That signifies death, the rest is only bravado. The scenes taken in Marseilles were excellent, but the submarine warfare was, I ventured to think, not more than fairly good. And I frankly declined to believe that any woman in the height of passion could talk such Johnsonese as "When I learnt of the death of your son I denounced the cause which could sanction such barbarity." Nor could I quite believe in a nautical hero descending to Davy Jones's locker feet foremost while the executed spy rose from the ocean floor in billowy draperies like Leighton's Persephone greeting Demeter.

November 14.

"The Temptress"

CAPITOL.

THE theatre offering nothing of first-class importance this week I propose to consider the picture at the Capitol entitled *The Temptress*, said to be adapted from a novel by Ibanez. This I cannot believe unless for "adapted" I am to read "distorted." This film is noteworthy because it combines the maximum of outward decency and of corrupt implication. Speaking with a full sense of responsibility I say that this picture, if taken seriously, must befoul the mind of any young person who looks at it. I will not admit the validity of the plea that harm cannot possibly be done by a picture because cinema-goers are too well educated to impute any depth of meaning to that which intelligent people have no difficulty in recognising as trash. The time allotted by the operator to the captions is sufficient proof that the bulk of cinema-goers is held to be illiterate and only able to read if time is given to spell each word. *The Temptress* is an immoral film because it encourages typists, shop girls and nursemaids to believe that a career of vice and lewdness may be redeemed by the ultimate shedding of a couple

of tears into the corner of a lace handkerchief, with the further implication that a girl who scrubs a floor or darns a stocking is a fool, whereas a woman who ruins a man's life and then makes a spectacular, pseudo-sacrificial exit from the mess is to be counted among the saints. I am told that as Ibanez wrote the story it is entirely moral. If this be true then this film is doubly noteworthy, for the reason that it proves beyond the shadow of a doubt the essential vulgarity of the American film mind. The key to that mind is shown in the title and sub-title to this picture—*The Temptress : A Mighty Drama of Human Moths Hovering About the Flame of Desire.*

Now you must know the story. Elena, the wife of the Marquis Torre De Bianca and mistress of the banker, Fontenoy, meets at a masked ball Robledo, her husband's boyhood friend, who has just arrived in Paris from the Argentine. Elena's face presages snow. But it is at once apparent that she can at will subdue her eyes to the melting mood. After dropping tears faster than the Arabian trees their medicinal gum, the young woman yields herself in the glutinous fashion approved of seamstresses, and under vows of eternal fidelity. Robledo is naturally piqued to discover next day that Elena is his friend's wife, and exhibits reasonable temper upon discovering that both she and her husband are dependent upon the bounty of a rich banker. But the bank cannot be a very good one since the profits are absorbed in Elena's extravagance, and the necessity for providing her with fresh trinkets

drives the banker into embezzlement. The ruined Fontenoy, complete with white waistcoat and gardenia, commits suicide at a banquet at which he has denounced his mistress as a strumpet. "And a very nice thing to be," gurgle and coo the thronged stenographers in the gallery, nestling still closer in the bosoms of their invoice clerks.

Now Robledo goes back to the Argentine and "a man's work," including the construction of a dam. But he has not been there many months when a stage-coach comes rattling across the Argentine plain. From it descends Bianca, the *mari complaisant*, who quite incredibly has come out to make good. An enormous coach-door is now shown on the screen and beneath it there emerges a dainty, nattily shod foot, a gossamer ankle, and a calf superbly hosed. These belong to Elena, now consumed with passion for the man who scorned her, but at the same time not averse from snapping up any unconsidered trifles of virility that may be lying around. To this end she has brought over to the land of pampas and buffalo the contents of sixteen Parisian wardrobes, baring her back that night at dinner for the delectation of cattle ranchers and dam constructors. Hereabouts a brigand of sorts appears—one Manos Duros, all teeth and sardonics. For some reason or other he doesn't want the dam to be built, and for the good reason that he wants her himself denies Robledo's right to the lady. A challenge follows, and Duros chooses bull-whips. Robledo's hairy chest is now thrown on the screen, followed by

Elena gloating and doting on the balcony. The duel is frankly sadistic, and at the end of it Elena fondles her lover's weals and kisses his bloodstained hand. "After all," she says, "though you hate me you have fought for me." "Rot," replies Robledo, or words to that effect, "I fought because the fellow was interfering with my dam." This is the one and only sensible sentiment enunciated throughout the whole picture. Shortly afterwards Elena's husband is shot in mistake for Robledo, and she is the cause whereby one of her would-be lovers is murdered. But you may heap Ossa upon Pelion without shaking the resolution of a he-man from the Argentine. Finding herself unable to melt this block of ice, and herself thawed by a sticky infant belonging to a native squaw, Elena steals out into the night taking with her as much of her sixteen wardrobes as will go into a small handbag. Whether the stage-coach with its twelve horses was conveniently waiting or whether she spent the night among the hospitable bulrushes we are not told. Sufficient that she goes out of Robledo's life and back to the Rue Montmartre which is her spiritual home.

Now let me not be childish in this matter of moral and immoral implication. I do not believe that extraordinarily beautiful ladies, unhandicapped by any moral sense, die in the gutter. That was the morality of Prévost whose courtesans were haled off to the Salpétrière, and of Dumas *fils* whose light ladies lingered in consumption until the time came for them to curl up on Louis Quinze sofas. But

Maupassant changed all that, and showed that with care and economy the *cocotte* may rise to be a *châtelaine* and in her old age endow convents. I do not believe that the Elena of this film would have been found dying of some horrible illness in a pauper's ward. I believe, on the contrary, that she would have returned to Paris and profess never to have heard of the Argentine. But in the film she does otherwise. It is true that she returns to Paris and does well, but to the American mind it is not thinkable that she should forget Robledo or his dam. That piece of engineering having been blown to pieces by the brigand, five years elapse while another dam is built in its place. We see the finished article and are present at the opening ceremony. Robledo has been decorated by the President and is about to address the throng. But suddenly the crowd parts, and a way is found for Elena, dressed in a quite uncustomary suit of solemn black, with tears in her eyes and clutching by the hand a totally unlooked-for mother ! Whereupon Robledo says—and it is in the application of his remark that the picture is immoral—that every great work of man, be it dam or grand opera, can only be brought to completion provided it is inspired by the love and heroism of a saintly and devoted woman. I submit that Elena's career is no part of hagiology and that the proper title to this film is *The Temptress : or the Apotheosis of a Harlot.* I write under correction, but I do not remember seeing any screen announcement to the effect that this piece has passed the British Board of Film Censors. And I

cannot help asking myself why the sugar-candy glorification of prostitution should be allowed, and wondering how much chance a film, in which the same subject was sincerely treated by a considerable artist, would have of getting past our alleged bulldog vigilance.

January 2, 1927.

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